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Former British PM
Blair converts to Catholicism

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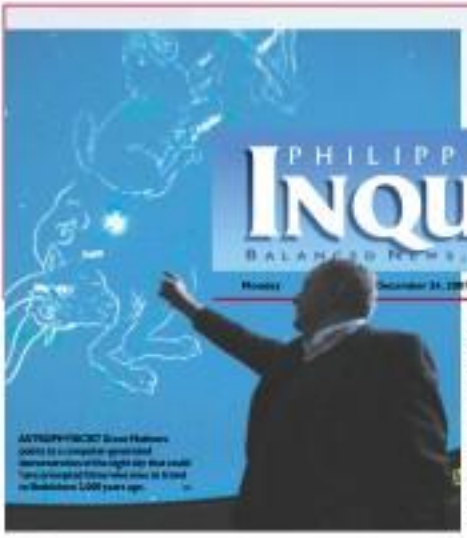
Pro-Thaksin party
claims victory in first post-coup Thai polls

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

Young RP singing star shines abroad
By Marinel R. Cruz



Scientist explains 'Star in East'

Cops rearrest Jalosjos

Prospects dismal GMA popularity will improve

By Amando Doronila

ANALYSIS

JALOSJOS: Hot bail, frustrated and disappointed

Child rapist to stay in Zamboanga jail

By Julie S. Alipala and Linda B. Sabayton

ZAMBOANGA CITY—CHILD RAPIST ROMEO Jalosjos, back in custody after at least 12 hours of freedom, is crying illegal arrest.

Dapitan escapade catches Palace flat-footed

By Christine O. Avendaño

Gordon-Garcia tandem floated for 2010 polls

By Cynthia C. Cabacungan Jr.

HOMECOMING: Air force men from Sumilao, Bukidnon, board a military cargo plane at Villanueva Air Base for Cagayan de Oro City.

Reds OK ceasefire after attack in Samar

By Delfin T. Mallari Jr. and Joey A. Gobrin

55 farmers back in Sumilao—and hopeful

By Ryan D. Rosauro and Ma. Cecilia Rodriguez

WEATHER FORECAST

Second FRONTPAGE

EZ2
4 8
SUERTRES
6 9 8 | 5 2 5
SUPERLOTTO 6/49
12 17 28 36 46 48
P36,188,861.40

Oust-Villar plot slammed

'Selfish motives' behind attempt, says Cayetano

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PNP REVIEWING final report on Glorietta blast /A5

By Gil Cabacungan

SEN. ALAN PETER Cayetano yesterday claimed that minority senators pushing for the ouster of Senate President Manuel Villar were driven by "selfish motives" because of their presidential ambitions and their failure to get choice committee positions which went to majority bloc allies.

Cayetano said that extreme ouster Villar's lack of form and consensus-style leadership, specifically his preference to hold debates in the executive hangar rather than on the senate floor, were largely unfounded and were being made to cover up for a botched attempt to oust Villar where the perpetrators were caught red-handed.

He said it was only natural for Villar's possible break for the 2010 presidency to preamble because of what they perceive as the advantages of being a senate President. Also, Cayetano said the complainers were expected because "you can't please all 23 senators."

Villar has been criticized not only by senators in the minority bloc—namely Senators Mar Roxas, Panfilo Lacson, and Jamby Madrigal—but also by his own allies—Senators Richard Gordon and Edgardo Angara—which have led to talks of a looming shakeup in the Senate leadership.

In an interview with DZMM radio, Cayetano said he found nothing wrong with Villar's style of getting a consensus rather than going through an acrimonious debate on a specific bill because "nobody was being prevented from asking any question."

Cayetano said the majority of the senators continued to believe in Villar's leadership having passed eight of the nine priority bills endorsed by the Legislative Executive Development Advisory Council (Ledac) (Only the amendments to the Electric Power Industry Reform Act or Epira have not been approved) and the polls giving the Senate high marks.

Even if one or two members of the majority bloc switch sides, Cayetano said Villar would remain secure in his post.

Villar emerged as the Senate President after he was able to gain the support of three opposition members and 16 administration and independent senators in the 23-member Senate. The minority bloc is composed of Roxas, Lacson, Madrigal, Sens. Loren Legarda, Benigno Aquino II, Rodolfo Biazon, Antonio Trillanes IV and Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr.

On criticisms that investigations have been delayed under Villar's leadership, Cayetano said there were four pending probes—the national broadband network contract with ZTE Corp.; the alleged Malampaya payoffs; the North Rail overprice; and the National Transmission Corp. bidding—which he expected to be wrapped up or started by January or February next year.

BETTER TO LIGHT A CANDLE
President Macapagal-Arroyo holds a candle as she joins Bro. Mike Velarde, El Shaddai founder, during the 'one bright prayer' that coincided with the Christmas celebration of the religious group on Roxas Road, Paranaque City, over the weekend. MALACAÑANG PHOTO

OVERBOOKED FLIGHTS

RP-bound Pinoys stranded in HK

By Tarra Quismundo and Blanche Rivera

MANY FILIPINOS RUSHING HOME TO Manila for the holidays were stranded for hours at Chek Lap Kok airport on Saturday after they were bumped off their scheduled flights reliably turned out to be overbooked.

Airports Phased for at least 40 passengers booked for an 11 a.m. Cebu Pacific Air flight from Hongkong after they were made to wait for almost 12 hours at the airport before they could board a flight for Manila.

As it turned out, the airline had overbooked, barring an seven seats for passengers who had purchased their tickets as early as September.

"The airline overbooked. We have no control over this," said Chan Cheong Fin, manager at the Hong Kong airport check in counter that handles Cebu Pacific.

Chan counted at least 40 passengers who arrived at 9 a.m. on Saturday but found the check in counters already closed when it was still two hours away before their scheduled flight to Manila. Some had run out that late even for passengers who had bought their tickets months ahead.

"The overbooking started the other day. This is crazy. It was not like that last year. It's very hard for us," Chan said in an interview at the Hong Kong airport.

Boarded for commuters in Manila, Cebu Pacific used Saturday's booking problem was because of an "enrollment of passengers" leaving for Manila. The airline had to make a fourth trip (Manila-Hong Kong-Manila), from the usual three, to accommodate the number of passengers who seemed to be home for the holidays.

To compensate for the inconvenience, Cebu Pacific gave roundtrip travel vouchers (Manila-Hong Kong-Manila) for passengers who were bumped off their scheduled flights.

The last flight at 1:30 a.m. Sunday carried 333 passengers, including migrant workers and other Hong Kong-based Filipinos who could not get seats in earlier flights of Cebu Pacific and other airlines.

Cebu Pacific said 10 passengers who were bumped off the 11 a.m. flight were placed on a 7:25 p.m. flight. The flight, however, left Hong Kong at 9:40 p.m. and arrived in Manila at 10:30 p.m.

Rosario Ong, a domestic helper from Cavite, had purchased her ticket in November, choosing Cebu Pacific over other airlines for its cheaper fare. As she was going home for just a brief visit, she booked the 11 a.m. flight so she would arrive in Manila at 4 p.m. on Saturday.

"I went to the other airline so I can get a cheaper fare, but it turns out you'll just get upset," said Rosario in Filipino.

Another stranded passenger, Evelyn Perez, had asked her family to travel early from San Pablo, Laguna on the Nissan Ago bus terminal airport to avoid traffic. But they had to wait for long hours in the Naia before they finally saw Evelyn.

Australia warns of terror attacks

AUSTRALIA SAY WARNED there could be terrorist attacks in the Philippines over Christmas, although the Asian country's police chief said yesterday security officials had not uncovered especific threat.

The Australian Embassy post, of a travel advisory on its Web site warning Australians to steer clear of places frequented by foreigners, and strongly advised against travel in Mindanao, where al-Qaida-linked militants are active.

"Credible information indicates terrorists may be in the advanced stages of planning attacks. Attacks may be imminent and could occur at any time, anywhere in Mindanao," it said.

"Attacks could occur in the lead up to and following the Christmas celebrations," it added, without elaborating or identifying the source of its information.

Philippine National Police chief Director General Avelino Razon said security officials were studying Australia's warning but have so far discovered no specific terror threat anywhere in the country.

The 125,000-strong police force has been placed on "heightened alert" to prevent any attacks and secure crowded public areas, Razon said.

Government forces have been battling a variety of threats led by Muslim guerrillas and at least four Muslim militant groups, including the small but brutal al-Qaida-linked Abu Sayyaf, which is blacklisted by Washington as a terrorist organization. AP

WASTONG PAGKAIN, ABOT-KAYANG BILHIN!

MFA Rice	P58.25	Rice Premium	P27-30
		Rice Fancy	P30-45
		Bangus	P70-90
		Tilapia	P80-90
Regular Well Milled	P20-25	Galunggong	P85-120
Well Milled Rice	P22-28	Kamaru	P40-70
		Pechay	P25-50
		Sitaw	P45-60
		Talong	P40-65

dti

BUTI-TIP: Upgrading kumain ng prutas at gulay araw-araw.

HOTLINE: 0920-4430814

Erap makes rounds with new jokes

By Kristine L. Alave

MAKING THE ROUNDS OF PARties and speaking engagements, deposed president Joseph Estrada is regaling his audiences with jokes about his six-year detention, spiked with political satire.

"I was so lonely in my detention enclosure in Tanay that I often called in the dudes to amuse myself," began Estrada during a lunch hosted by his son Joseph Victor "JV" Ejercito two weeks ago.

"I said, hello, hello. But they didn't answer me," said Estrada, who was convicted of plunder then pardoned by President Macapagal-Arroyo last October.

"So I cried, Hello, Guys. They replied, 'Hello, Ma'am,'" he said. "But I'm not a 'ma'am,' I'm a man."

Estrada said he told the dudes, in obvious reference to a controversial wiretapped conversation between Arroyo and an election commissioner that triggered accusations of electoral cheating in the 2004 elections.

"So the dudes said, 'I'm sorry.'" Estrada concluded, as his predominantly opposition audience burst into laughter, recalling Mr. Arroyo's televised apology over the "Hello Garci" scandal.

The 70-year-old former actor-cum-likewise make-fun-of-himself, a trait that has evidently endeared him to his fans and always brings the house down.

On Saturday night, as the prayers ended by the Catholic charismatic group El Shaddai in Paranaque City he had his own take on an old Filipino joke about a naughty who meets up with an even tougher character.

"I told (the government)...you see, file all your cases but I didn't do anything wrong," said Estrada in a tough, booming voice.

"But they jailed me," he said. "There in the stipended about June, he quipped. Di na kaya makiusap (can't you take a joke)."

Estrada, famous for his love for wine and women, also told the crowd that he has no intention of running for public office again, adding that he'd rather be a painter.

At another affair he said his detention in Tanay was so oppressive he had to make adjustments to his personal life. "I have now forgotten how it is to remember. My list is running," he said.

Estrada, who won the presidency in 1998 with the widest vote margin ever, usually fears the poor class, or, eventually gets serious.

Kiko asks: Where's list of Comelec nominees?

By Dona Pazzibugan

WHERE IS THE LIST OF NOMINEES FOR THE next Commission on Elections chair?

Senate Majority Leader Francis Pangilinan said the deadline imposed by the Malacañang search committee for receiving nominees passed two weeks ago but it has not announced the nominees.

"We are calling the shots as to who has been nominated to a truly crucial post. How can we scrutinize the nominees if their names are being withheld," he said.

"This lack of transparency is unacceptable," he continued.

The selection committee formed by President Macapagal-Arroyo released a panel on last Nov. 28 announcing that it has extended the period for submission of applications and nominations for the next Comelec posts until Dec. 6.

Aside from the chair, Malacañang also has to appoint a Comelec commissioner to replace Commissioner Mehol Sadain, who retired in April 2006.

Malacañang short list

The last Comelec chair, Benjamin Abalos Sr., resigned last Oct. 1 after he was accused of offering Subic businessman Dennis Borromeo Rumsfeld Sarao's P200-million bribe to approve the $305-million National Broadband Network project assisted.

Last October, acting Comelec Chair Resurreccion Borra disclosed a supposed Malacañang short list that includes two lawyers of current President Joseph Estrada—Cagayan de Oro Rep. Rufus Rodriguez and former Sen. Nene Pimentel.

Dibonsucan-Lim short list were former Sen. Wigberto Tañada, Howard Calleja, legal counsel of the British Parliamentary Council for Responsible Voting, former University of the East law dean Amado Valdez, nonactivist candidate Steven Melendrez Jr. and the Comelec's law department chief Alioden Dalog.

Borra and Commissioner Florentino Tuason will also retire in February 2008.

The Malacañang search committee is headed by Former Gov. Abalos, who served as labor secretary and Social Security System chair under the late President Ferdinand Marcos and Mrs. Macapagal.

The other members are Liberal Nationalist Movement for Free Elections chair Jose Concepcion, newspaper columnist Carmen Pedroza, former Interior Secretary Hernan Jaymee and Democratic Alternative of the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines.

PAMASKONG HANDOG

Vice President Noli de Castro distributes Christmas goodies in Makati City residents under the "Pamaskong Handog" of President Macapagal-Arroyo's People's Servant-Leaders Mobile Action (PSMA) program. The gas-powered pans are gift goods, health insurance cards, 121 basic scholarships, and permits to open Tindahan Main and Botika ng Barangay during the Dec. 19 gift-giving at the Carmona Sports Complex.

Aging work force of OFWs worries recruiters

By Margaux C. Orta

AN AGING MIGRANT WORK FORCE could spell disaster to the country's economy in a few years, according to the local recruitment industry.

Leo Soriano, former president of Philippine Association of Service Exporters Inc. (PASEI), said there should be a strong intervention from both government and private sector to encourage graduates to find high-paying jobs abroad.

"Most of our qualified migrant workers are now in the 35 to 55 age bracket," Soriano, president of Leo Jaffe recruitment Solutions Corp., said in an interview.

Soriano lamented that most of the country's graduates—numbering to about 800,000 annually—do not have the qualifications needed for technical jobs abroad.

"We could be facing a disastrous situation in three to five years, when the majority of the general overseas Filipino workers would be nearing their forty jobs," Soriano said.

He said that the most important solution to the problem would be to emphasize the importance of technical-vocational (tech-voc) education as opposed to traditional courses.

"Education stakeholders such as university owners and administrators should invest in vocational training, especially in the provinces," Soriano said.

He emphasized that contrary to what most people think, vocational graduates such as welders, carpenters, mechanics, technicians, welders, machinists, and pipefitters are in demand abroad.

In the Middle East, these technical workers could earn $500 to $800 a month. In Western countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, their salaries range from $1,500 to $7,000 a month.

"A welder in Canada could earn a whopping $7,000, while an underwater engineer without any special station could get only $2,000," Soriano said.

Soriano pointed out that the change in attitude toward vocational education should start from the family itself.

"Parents should encourage their children to take the tech-voc route instead of pressuring them to take up the usual traditional courses," he added.

Wife fears for jailed radioman's life

By Lelia B. Salaverria

THE WIFE OF JAILED RADIO COMmentator Alexander Adonis has sought the help of Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez to ensure the safety of her husband who was allegedly taken off detention and then brought to a hospital.

In a letter to Gonzalez addressed to Gracious Gladys Adonis said she was worried that her husband would be harmed during these supposedly unscheduled trips from his prison cell.

Adonis is detained at the Davao Penal Colony. He was convicted of libel for saying that Davao City Rep. Prospero Nograles was allegedly seen entering naked in a Manila hotel after he and a woman he was supposedly having an affair with were caught by the woman's husband.

"Although he was reportedly escorted by three to four personnel from the penal farm, I am afraid something (might) happen to him during the travel ... this has already happened in the past when prisoners were shot for allegedly trying to escape, Secretary Gonzalez, we cannot on our own help to secure the safety of my husband," Adonis' wife said.

She also expressed concern on how Adonis could be pulled out of the detention center when his fellow media practitioners have a till Sixth time visiting him in jail.

Adonis was brought to the Davao Medical Center from the Davao Penal Colony on Dec. 11 for an "unscheduled checkup."

"We are worried about the security of Gee because of what happened ... does this mean that he can be pulled out of the Penal Farm when some of his friends from the media cannot even visit him freely? We think this is not fair," Adonis' wife said.

Aliens told to get I-Cards by Dec. 31

THE BUREAU OF IMmigration (BI) yesterday reminded foreign nationals in the country that they have only until Dec. 31 to register their alien certificate of registration (ACR) with the new "I-Card."

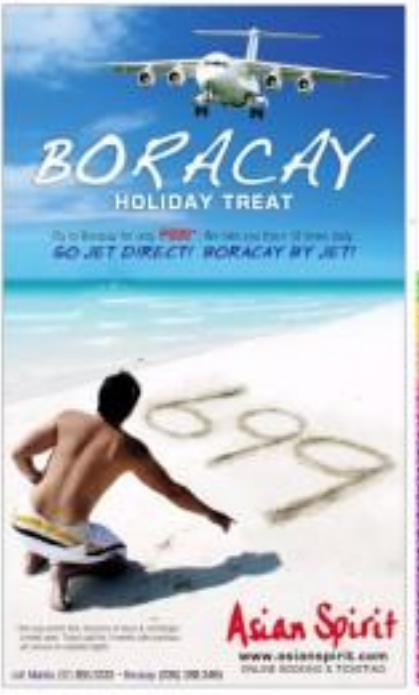
BI Commissioner Marcelino Libanan urged foreigners who have not replaced their ACRs to secure their I-Cards as soon as possible to avoid future inconveniences.

"A foreigner who does not replace his ACR with an I-Card can be charged with violating the immigration and alien registration act and deported for being an improperly documented alien," Libanan said.

The BI chief explained that the bureau has stopped honoring ACRs as proof of a foreigner's legal status since the bureau launched its I-Card project in 2004.

More than 122,000 foreigners have already been issued I-Cards, Libanan said.

"Foreigners who holders account for about 60 percent of the I-Card applicants while the rest are holders of non-immigrant and special visas," Libanan said. Margaux Ortiz



A TV newsman documents the departure of the 33 Higaonon farmers from Manila to their homes and land woes in Mindanao. JOEY SY

55 farmers back in Sumilao–and hopeful

By [illegible]

[illegible] to rejuvenate and gather their strength for the long struggle ahead.

"We went back home because the next steps in our struggle will take place here," Morales said. He said that in the next few days, the group would challenge the Department of Agrarian Reform to take concrete actions to implement the decision of President Macapagal-Arroyo.

"We firmly believe that because of the support of the bishops, the opinion of experts like the former DAR secretaries and officials and the commissioners of President Arroyo, we are confident that there's no more reason for the DAR to drag its feet," he said.

Members of the Archdiocesan Caravan de Oro and Bukidnon and supporters from various NGOs joined the farmers' motorcade to pass their call for the extension of the comprehensive agrarian reform program that is due to expire next year.

After camping out in Manila for more than two weeks, the farmers won a reprieve on Tuesday when Mrs Arroyo issued an order placing the disputed property back under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program.

SMC appeal

But the SMC subsidiary has alleged "fraud, lies," and given 15 days to appeal this. The DAR said it considers today a notice of coverage yet until the President's order had been delivered "final and executory."

The journey of the monks was just the first step of a tedious process that the farmers had to go through before they could repossess the land.

The original landowners, Hacienda Quiomping, sold the property to DARI in 2000, three years after the Supreme Court affirmed a 1996 Malacañang order converting it into agricultural estate.

Tough task

In 2004, the farmers petitioned the government to revoke the conversion order, arguing that SMH failed to develop the property in five years, and hence, the land should revert back to them under CARP.

The DAR awarded the land to the farmers in 1993.

Also yesterday, the bishop Ellosang Magbukdod ng Pilipinas said the farmers' tough task of reclaiming their land would include paying back SMH some 92.4 billion for its investment in the estate.

Forever in debt

"Yes, technically the land may be theirs but practically speaking they will forever be in debt just trying to pay for that land. This has happened to majority of the so-called beneficiaries of the 'CARP' [illegible] RMP chair Rafael Mariano said.

Under this scenario, it would be easier for big landlords, like businessman Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco, to entice farmers into agreeing to arduous like ground-up, joint venture agreements, cooperatives, leasehold and leaseback arrangements, and take over the lands again.

"That is the basis of [illegible] why the Palace and SMC are haggling over the price of the land, but to with most cases it will be too steep for farmers," Mariano said.

Reds OK ceasefire after attack on Samar police station

By [illegible]

ed Dec. 16 and will end at midnight of Jan. 6.

Bond made it clear the New People's Army would not let its guard down despite observing a ceasefire.

"All units of the NPA are instructed to closely monitor the movements of the AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines), paramilitary vigilante, be on active defense and decisively counteroff forms of treachery by the [illegible] armed forces," the statement said.

"The need to intensify the people's war remains as the Arroyo regime relentlessly pursues its brutal war on terror."

Bond's statement was furnished the reporters at around 5:15 p.m. yesterday or about 12 hours after the Samar attack.

The said occurred three days before the 39th anniversary of the founding of the CPP.

A day before the attack, a regional army commander on Leyte Island threatened an "exemplary talk" rebel elements to launch major tactical offensives in his area to coincide with the anniversary of the establishment of the CPP on Dec. 26, 1968.

Second assault

Armed with high-powered guns and a grenade launcher, NPA guerrillas raided the police station in Hinabangan town on Samar, setting off a gun battle with defenders in which one civilian was killed in the encounter, officials said.

It was the second major guerrilla attack since the government declared truce.

In the Samar incident, the guerrillas stalled the arrival of government reinforcements by setting up a blocking force and planting land mines on a secondary road in the Hinabangan town hall, where the police station was located.

One police officer was reported missing after the raid, according to an Army report.

Visitor killed

The father of one of the policemen on duty was killed by the crossfire as the four policemen at the station herded the raiders, according to the regional office of the Philippine National Police in Palo, Leyte.

Investigators said the four [illegible] were Pedro Abadiano, who was at the station visiting his son, PO2 Raffon Abadiano, when the guerrillas struck.

Police said the elder Abadiano was a former member of the Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit. A militiaman reporting to [illegible] described him as a militiaman.

The rebels fled on foot, taking with them three guns, two hand grenades and other items they had found in the station and at other offices in the town hall.

2nd floor battle

Investigator Insp. William Hojas said the four policemen [illegible] in the second floor of the building, where they engaged the rebels in a gun battle.

Initial PNP reports said the attack was carried out by a rebel unit led by a "Ka Bong" and "Ka Homer."

The other policemen on duty during the raid were identified as PO2 Joel Manog, PO2 Elmidio Rosales and PO1 Melton Flores.

Lt. Col. Jonathan Bonoc, commanding officer of the 62nd Infantry Battalion, said the presence of a guerrilla blocking force and the land mines delayed the dispatch of reinforcements.

It was the second major NPA attack on government forces since Malacañang's unilateral declaration of a suspension of military operations from Dec. 16 to Jan. 6.

PNP Director General Avelino Razon Jr. said it was not yet certain if a police officer was indeed missing even as he denied reports that the raiders had taken the police officers' firearms.

"This incident, once again proved that the NPA terrorists do not want peace to reign in our country," Lt. Col. Ernesto Torres, Army spokesperson, said.

Fight if provoked

A week ago, Cleto stationed Marines in civilian clothes were killed in an ambush by the NPA in Palanas).

In his statement, Bond said all NPA units had been instructed to remain alert against counter-insurgency operations, "and—if provoked—bend all or regular its tactical offensives."

According to Bond, the NPA unilaterally observes military exercises on Christmas and the New Year even if there is no formal declaration of a ceasefire.

"In practiced for many years, the Filipino people, their people's army and revolutionary forces unite in humble traditional holiday celebration and in the commemoration of the anniversary of the Communist Party," Bond said.

Accomplishment report

He said the NPA's observance of a four-day ceasefire had nothing to do with the government's "totally short-sighted and hypocritical" suspension of combat operations which, he claimed, was only a camouflage for continuing military operations.

He claimed the military had been completely ignoring its self-declared ceasefire since day one of its effectivity.

In a recently released accomplishment report, the Armed Forces said it was able to dismantle 13 guerrilla fronts in 2000 and could dismantle 17 more by the first quarter of next year.

The report said there 17 fronts were "on the advanced stages of degradation and have a high probability of being either dismantled, downgraded, and dissolved by the first quarter of 2002."

'All talk, no action'

Lt. Gen. Rodolfo Obviniza, chief of the Southern Luzon Command, said the rebels had yet to conduct an offensive on the occasion of the CPP anniversary that would have significant impact on the AFP's anti-insurgency campaign in Southern Tagalog and Bicol.

"We are always ready, be it their anniversary or not," Obviniza said in a statement sent to the bureau. "So we have said time and again, the CPP and the New People's Army statement threats are all empty talk but no action."

GMA's timetable

After an ideological split with a 1930s era pro-Soviet communist party that the military defeated in the 1970s, former university professor Jose Maria Sison in 1968 set up the CPP with a Maoist-oriented ideology.

Peace talks between the Arroyo administration and the insurgents bogged down in August 2004 after the rebels' insistence on the 126 list of consultant organizations.

President Macapagal-Arroyo has called for the defeat of the communist insurgency by 2006.

With a report from Nikko Dizon in Manila

3-year ceasefire offer a military ruse–Sison

By [illegible]

COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE Philippines (CPP) founding chair Jose Ma. Sison has scoffed at President Macapagal-Arroyo's claims that the communist insurgency would be wiped out by 2010.

Sison, chief political consultant of the CPP-led National Democratic Front, also said the government's offer of a three-year ceasefire was a ruse for the military to attack the rebels during its so-called internal operations.

He made the claim in an e-mail from The Netherlands, where he and several senior rebel leaders live in exile.

"The fake president, Gloria M. Arroyo, continues to rave about disarming the revolutionary movement before 2010 and shows no real remorse for terrorizing and forcibly displacing more than one million people from their homes and land and for creating the extrajudicial killing, abduction and torture of more than a thousand legal activists," Sison said.

Mr Arroyo said at Friday's anniversary of the formal forces that the insurgency would be wiped out by 2010, claiming the guerrillas' strength had been cut down by half from 12,000 in 2001.

Part of payoff

Quoting CPP spokesperson Gregorio "Ka Roger" Rosal, Sison said the government wanted the NPA to stop fighting, while the soldiers, policemen and paramilitary forces were free to "attack the people and the revolutionary forces in the name of 'peace and order.'"

Sison said the "military proposal" of AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Hermogenes Esperon Jr. for a three-year ceasefire was "a cheap payout trick to tie the hands of the armed revolutionary movement and allow the AFP, PNP and paramilitary forces to attack ... the revolutionary forces with impunity."

Mr Arroyo's statement about the payoff for such a ceasefire were also also meant to "obscure the gross and systematic human rights violations" by security forces, he said.

Conditions spelled out

Sison said a prolonged ceasefire between the two camps was possible under certain conditions:

- Both sides must agree on the so-called 10 principles in the proposed interim agreement for an [illegible] and just peace.
- The government must recognize the political authority and sections of the "people's democratic government."

Troops pullout

- The government must withdraw military troops to division headquarters and the police mobile brigades to brigade headquarters, and disband the paramilitary forces.
- The government must remove the 12 impediments that prevent the resumption of formal talks.
- The government must agree to accelerate the peace negotiations to reconfirm with The Hague Joint Declaration.

Sison said one problem with the Arroyo administration was that "it cannot restrain the people and the revolutionary forces to stop their just resistance and capitulate under the guise of ceasefire."

COMING SOON

PNP reviewing final report on Glorietta blast

By Nicole Puga

THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL Police (PNP) is reviewing its final report and comparing it with an initial report submitted by Ayala Land Inc. (ALI) on the cause of the Oct. 19 Glorietta 2 blast which killed 11 people.

"Yes, we are reviewing their initial report and comparing it with our own final report that is due to come out," PNP Chief Director General Avelino Razon told the Inquirer yesterday.

To be included on the final report is a list of those who might be charged for the explosion.

Police said they would file charges of negligence resulting in multiple homicide and serious and slight physical injuries against those responsible for the third blast.

Southern Police District (SPD) director Chief Supt. Lutic Tiotuico said ALI's report, submitted some time in the beginning of November, was "helpful" in the preparation of their final report on the blast.

Helpful report

"I think the report was helpful. We heard some details as evidence or guides in our investigation and allowed us to check and double-check some of the aspects of our investigation," Tiotuico told the Inquirer.

He added that investigators validated and checked some observations in the report relative to their investigation.

But Tiotuico declined to say if they agreed with or contested any of the findings in ALI's report, saying all of them will be revealed when they release the PNP's final report to the public.

"Whatever we will reveal in our final report will be based on evidence. There will be only one official report and that will come from us. This report will be used as basis for the filing of charges in relation to the blast," Tiotuico said.

Immediately after the blast, the PNP had said that the blast might have been caused by an explosion of a liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) tank. Later, police forensic experts said they found traces of RDX, an ingredient in explosives, at the blast site.

Turnaround

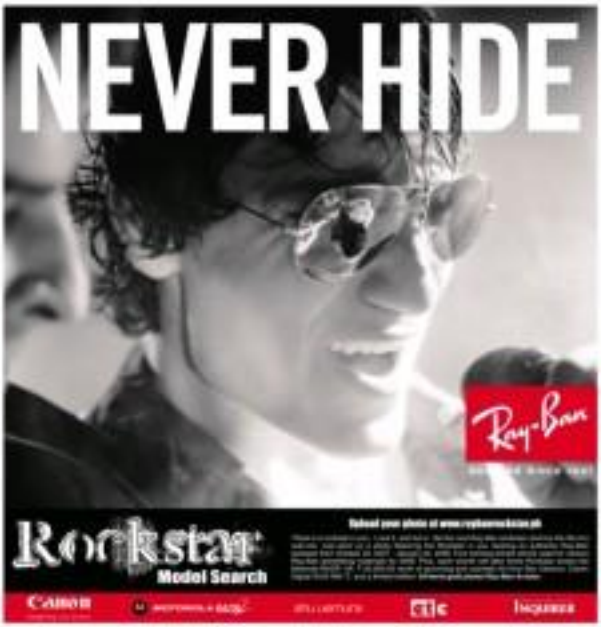
But the next day PNP made a turnaround and blamed the blast on the accumulation of ice in gases inside the basement of the Glorietta 2 mall. They said experts from the US, Australia and Israel, particularly the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Australian Federal Police (AFP), had worked with them on the investigation and came to the same conclusion.

But ALI, which operates Glorietta 2, disputed the PNP's theory, saying there was no accumulation of gases in the basement. It also called on the PNP to look into other causes while dropping the blast was caused by negligence.

ALI's report was based on the findings of local and foreign experts hired by the company to look into the cause of the blast. The company presented the findings of Dr. Stephen Etheridge, an international expert on blogas production, and specialists from the Dr. J. Ellingwood and Partners LLP both of which garnered one that it was impossible that enough methane or diesel vapor would be produced in the basement of Glorietta 2 to cause the explosion.

Experts from the University of the Philippines also doubted the PNP theory.

A week ago, the PNP said it was ready to present its findings. But Tiotuico said their investigators need reports probing the blast asked for more time to review their findings and moved the release of the report to January next year.



A POLICE NURSE takes the blood pressure of convicted child rapist Romeo Jalosjos soon after he arrived in Zamboanga City.

A TEARFUL but happy reunion takes place between Jalosjos and his 10-year-old mother Angelina inside the PNP main office at Camp Bonifacio.

Cops rearrest Jalosjos in Dapitan City

Front page A1

men Wood Cobey, which is more than 30 kilometers away from the city center.

Jalosjos said he was forced to go with the arresting officers belonging to the Zamboanga del Norte Provincial Police Office under Senior Supt. Mario Fraga "because they were all fully armed."

"Tumutol na lang kami because we don't want to confront armed troops," he said.

Jalosjos said "strong people and soldier Maluasburg" were behind his current troubles. But he refused to identify them.

"Rights nawa'l sana sa amin na i-ensure dyuge [their names] yes," he said, adding:

"The system is working very bad for our government, and I feel very bad. I feel so frustrated, so disappointed. And what about the feelings of others requesting to see me? They are all disturbed by the whole thing."

No reporter was allowed to speak with Jalosjos at the San Ramon Penal Colony.

"Vigilance is the only [way] to ensure that Jalosjos will no longer escape from custody," said Chief Supt. Jesus Carlitos Jovellanos of Western Mindanao.

Up to DOJ

In Manila, PNP Director General Avelino Razon Jr. said Jalosjos would remain at the San Ramon Penal Colony under the Department of Justice ordered his transfer back to the New Bilibid Prisons in Muntinlupa City.

"It's up in the DOJ if he should be transferred to Bilibid. Our order was only to recover him," Razon told the reporters by phone.

He said Jalosjos was taken to the penal colony because it was the "nearest" prison facility available.

And the prisoner may remain there on Christmas Day while the DOJ studies his case, Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez said.

Gonzalez' letter was to prevent Jalosjos from leaving his detention cell and going home to his family, Gonzalez said it was to "condone" on Zamboanga del Norte police officials in case it is that the case is not finished here.

"I believe he'll still be there," Gonzalez said when asked if Jalosjos would be in Zamboanga del Norte on Christmas Day. "We can [deescalating] when he will be retained [in the NBP]."

He said he wanted Jalosjos brought back to the national penitentiary because Zamboanga was close to the latter's hometown. "As a matter of fact, I want him to return to Manila."

'No one holding me'

Jalosjos insisted that based on his release order dated Dec. 14, he was a free man.

"In fact, I was already counting my days [to be released], and they don't want to keep me longer," he said.

According to Jalosjos, on Dec. 17 he left the NBP to hear a Christmas dawn Mass ("Simbang gabi") with his family. He returned two days later to visit friends in prison.

Said the man: "No one was holding me. The guards even accepted me and stamped my wrist, and asked me to leave my cellular phone as it's not allowed to bring a unit inside. And they were treating me fine way because I am no longer detained. They were doing that because I was a visitor.

"I'm trusted that no one would trap him since he's already free," Jalosjos said. He declined knowledge of whether he has been told why police official of his plan to leave for his hometown.

'Nothing happening'

Jalosjos said Jalosjos had decided to comply with a "request" by NBP head Supt. Jesus Leopardo that he remain in the reservation until the investigation of his botched release was over.

"Since nothing was happening in the investigation, he decided to leave. He said neither that he wanted to spend Christmas with his family," she said.

Jalosjos was convicted in 1997 of two counts of statutory rape and sentenced to two life terms. The victim was an 11-year-old girl.

In April, President Macapagal-Arroyo commuted his sentence to 16 years.

On Dec. 10, Jalosjos was given a release document and allowed to walk free. In the face of public uproar, Malacañang and the Department of Justice said his discharge was not final, and prison officials took him back into custody.

Privileges

As a "living coat" inmate in the minimum security compound since March 13, Jalosjos enjoyed certain privileges, such as moving around with no guards or escorts.

Last June, assigned tasks like cleaning, the only thing expected of living-out inmates is to show up for the roll calls at 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Bureau of Corrections Director Ricardo Diaz said in an earlier interview.

As of October, about 900 inmates in the country are accorded living-out privileges, Diaz said.

He said those qualified to be living-out inmates were aged 60 or older, and who had only 6 to 10 months left in their sentence.

Separated calls made yesterday by the inquirer to Diaz's mobile phone were unanswered.

NBP chaplain Fr. Robert Glogger said in another earlier interview that whether preequirement for living-out inmates was that their residence should not be in Metro Manila, or they would be considered flight risks.

Jalosjos qualified for living-out status because his family is based in Dumfounga, Glogger said.

Despite said Jalosjos lawyers led by Cipriano Bolaños would assist in discuss their opinions.

He said the lawyer were considering filing for a writ of habeas corpus, but that nothing was filed yet. — With reporter JEANNA JULIE ARANDIA

'Nobody from NBP made a move to stop him'

By DJ Yap

RICHARD JALOSJOS WALABLE is leave the New Bilibid Prisons (NBP) reservation unhampered and unescorted by his jailers, his secretary said yesterday.

"Nobody from the NBP made a move to stop him. He left on his own because he believes he his already been discharged," said Ramon Empeño.

By Empeño's account, Jalosjos left the NBP in Muntinlupa City at about 10:30 a.m. on Saturday on board his sports utility vehicle and not accompanied by a close-in security aide. He got on a plane bound for Dipolog City in Zamboanga del Norte en route to Dapitan City at 11:20 a.m.

He spent Friday night in his nipa hut near the beach resort in the reservation, and overnight guests including Mass before leaving for the airport.

"He trusted that no one would stop him since he's already free," Empeño said. She declined knowledge of whether he have been told why prison official of his plan to leave for his hometown.

'Nothing happening'

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'Beautiful Christmas'

Jalosjos was hopeful that he would be granted "a beautiful Christmas" with his 10-year-old mother Angelina and the rest of his family.

"We are hoping it will not be a bleak Christmas. He are all praying for a White Christmas" for everyone," Angelina, who accompanied her son to Camp Bonifacio, said in Chavacano.

The mother said the family had not prepared anything for the special day "because we are all confused."

She stood on appeal to President Macapagal-Arroyo: "I hope you can only something about this. My son is free; please don't make it hard for him."

And she vowed not to leave her son, declaring: "I will stay wherever he is."

But Jalosjos and his seven lawyers do not have much time to ensure that he will spend Christmas in Dapitan.

It is widely believed that the rape convict has been running the affairs of Dapitan through his brother, Mayor Dominador Jalosjos.

Gonzalez said he had learned from Jalosjos' family that the ex-lawmaker left the NBP only on visit his family during the holidays and was intending to return to the national penitentiary.

"He was assuming he could do it. That was his mistake," Gonzalez said.

But he observed that such a movement could have been made only as an "all of height," after the rape convict's trip home was denied out.

In Tacay

The Justice secretary said Jalosjos' lies had requested that he be detained at the vacation house of deposed President Joseph Estrada in Tanay, Rizal.

However, he pointed out, he could not take cognizance of such a request because the vacation house was under the control of the Department of the Interior and Local Government.

Gonzalez said Jalosjos' departure from the NBP could not have set precedent for his imprisonment.

"What is clear here is that there was some kind of violation. As to how serious, I don't know. It's still under study," Gonzalez said.

He said the DOJ was determining whether to file charges, particularly evasion of service of sentence, against Jalosjos.

Should the man be found guilty of the charge, his sentence might go beyond April 2009, the DOJ computation of his release after the Christmas remission of his sentence.

"If he has a new case, it might prolong [his release]," Gonzalez said.

Evasion of service of sentence is punishable by imprisonment of up to six years.

Gonzalez had earlier said the DOJ computation of Jalosjos' release remains the same as the Dec. 14 order he received.

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Dapitan escapade catches Palace flat-footed

Front page A1

"You can hear the displeasure in her voice," Ermita said when asked whether the latest incident involving Jalosjos, a political ally of the President, had aggravated matters.

He said Malacañang did not know "how it happened" that Jalosjos was able to get in his native Dapitan City. "I was really surprised. Didn't he (is) in custody?"

Gonzalez said Bb Arroyo had told him that he should handle the investigation of the matter because the Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) fell under his jurisdiction.

Asked how the President received the information on Jalosjos' flight, Gonzalez said: "She must be disturbed."

Not a flight risk

Ermita said neither the Palace nor the Department of Justice had authorized Jalosjos' travel to Dapitan.

But he quoted Gonzalez as saying that Jalosjos might have been able to leave the NBP because he was no longer considered a flight risk and thus had been enjoying "living out" privileges since the commutation of his sentence in April.

Asked whether Jalosjos would be charged for leaving prison without proper authority, Ermita said it was Gonzalez who was in a better position to answer that question.

But, decisively, he said, the Palace could not authorize Jalosjos' release because the BuCor was under the DOJ.

Earlier, the President was reported to have been upset at learning that NBP officials ordered the release of Jalosjos, who is believed to be eligible for release only when he turns 70 in 2018.

Mr Arroyo commuted to 16 years the rare life terms imposed on Jalosjos for raping an 11-year-old girl.

Senior officials subsequently said that by their computations, the rape-convict was eligible for release on April 2009, and not Dec. 16, which was the computation of then BuCor Director Victorio Venuses.

Quid pro quo

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. described the purported special treatment accorded Jalosjos as "political quid pro quo."

He said the President was willing to pay her dues even if it meant going against the public outrage over Jalosjos' release.

Pimentel said he doubted that Gonzalez would be able to carry out his threat to put Jalosjos back in jail.

"Let's see how far Raul, the Injustice Secretary, would pursue his threat to arrest the president. He probably can't do anything about it anymore," Pimentel said in a text message to the inquirer.

Former Solicitor General Francisco Chavez also expressed doubt over the government's sincerity in keeping Jalosjos in jail, saying the latter's removal could be part of "one big run-a-rels."

According to Chavez, Jalosjos' release earlier this month was recalled as a result of public outrage.

But when public interest waned, Jalosjos seemed to be checking on Jalosjos' status anymore, Chavez said in a phone interview.

"It (The government) really wants is to let him off the hook. His application was processed by the government. When nobody was looking, [then Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez] ordered his arrest," Chavez added, citing the title of a novel and subsequent movie about a hospital patient's flight from circumcision.

As for Jalosjos' evasion after his flight, Chavez said it could be "still be done."

He said the prisoner was saying one thing, the jumbo secretary was saying another, and Malacañang did not appear to be aware of what's going on.

"It's part of a bag of tricks. Eventually, it will be forgiven by the people who don't care. When the public clamor has died down, who will follow up on Jalosjos' status? By that time, Jalosjos will be free," Chavez said.

He said he was "apprehensive" that Jalosjos could skip the country because no hold-departure order had been issued on the man.

Chavez censured Jalosjos' appearances on the San Ramon Penal Colony in Zamboanga del Norte, saying the escaped felon should be brought back to the national penitentiary and detained there like other convicts.

"That would be a violation of the law," he said in reference to Jalosjos' classmates at the Zamboanga prison. "A convicted criminal should be at the [NBP] in Muntinlupa."

Chavez said that since Jalosjos and inmates not only a propensity for flight but had already actually escaped, he should be placed under maximum security detention at the NBP despite his status as a minimum security prisoner before his flight in Dapitan.

Asked to comment on the police statement that Jalosjos should stay in the Zamboanga prison because he was able to escape from the NBP, Chavez said the authorities should be tighter security.

"We must not be brought back to Bilibid and placed under heavy guard. That's the solution," he said. — With reports from Leila B. Salaverria and Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

Pinoys bring 'Simbang Gabi' to Singapore

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.
Correspondent

SINGAPORE—THEY MAY BE OUTSIDE the country, but many Filipinos in Singapore are making sure their celebration of Christmas still feels like home.

In the process, they have introduced some uniquely Filipino Christmas traditions to Singaporeans and other nationalities in the city state—the Simbang Gabi, a series of nine pre-dawn Catholic Masses; and the Philippine haircuts or parol, which now adorn many Catholic churches here.

When the novena Masses were first introduced in Singapore in 1999, the Filipino language was used, since only Filipinos were attending the Masses, said Catholic priest Angel Luciano, who is also a Filipino.

But Father Angel, as he is known to his parishioners, said he eventually shifted to using English during the Mass because more and more foreigners began attending.

The number of churchgoers trying to complete the nine novena Masses has increased. For the second Mass this year, there is a thousand churchgoers throned up at the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and Infant Angel.

"The turn out was simply overwhelming," he said.

Church volunteers and priests of other nationalities have also joined the novena Masses. Last year, a parish priest of the Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, who is Vietnamese, concelebrated the Masses, said Father Angel.

Simbang Gabi, Singapore style, is held at 8 p.m. and each Mass is held in a different church.

There are about 125,000 Filipinos in Singapore, 60,000 of them domestic workers.

Looking for the churches is easy and fun, one churchgoer told Father Angel in a recent email.

She said she and her elder brother, who were joining the Simbang Gabi in Singapore for the first time last year, simply went to the nearest bus station.

"How did they know which of the buses to take? He said the Catholic nuns to look for the bus "with the longest, and usually the noisiest, line of Filipinos."

"We never got lost in looking for the churches," she said in her e-mail.

Having to visit different churches also gives the experience a deeper meaning, she added.

Host parishes cook free food for the churchgoers. Gifts are distributed to children. Members of the community also take turns decorating the parish with lanterns, a symbol for Filipinos that Christmas is just around the corner.

Father Angel receives numerous e-mails from churchgoers expressing gratitude for being able to experience a truly Filipino Christmas even if they are miles away from home.

One e-mail writer said it was the first time he had actually completed the nine Masses, and he has done it outside the Philippines.

Other laymen mentioned the joy of visiting different churches in Singapore, which sometimes rephrasing with the forms of the Iloilo Iglesia, yet another folk religious tradition that sees thousands of Filipinos on pilgrimages to several churches during Holy Week.

Last year, a priest of another parish expressed happiness about being part of the Simbang Gabi experience.

Father Angel said the parish priest "encapsulated the Filipinos for filling the churches of Singapore and the world with their presence."

It is therefore not surprising that each of the parishes they visit for the novena Masses is always teeming with churchgoers, Father Angel said. The world has started to know Filipinos not only for their skills and diligence, but also for their deep faith and unique Christmas traditions.

GIVE LOVE. Children of migrant Filipino families sing "Give Love on Christmas Day" on the first day of Simbang Gabi on Dec. 15 at the Church of St. Anthony in Woodlands. They are called the Pocop Kids (for Pinoy Children of St. Anthony de Padua, organized in 2001).

'Loneliest' Christmas away from home

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

THE WILL PROBABLY BE THE "LONELIest" Christmas.

Software company writer Joanne Cang, 22, is celebrating her first Christmas away from her family. She got a job here only two months ago and while she said it would be interesting to observe how other cultures celebrate the season, she said she would miss her family a lot.

Her uncle has just transferred to Singapore and her sister is coming over to be with her, but she says she will really miss the "festive atmosphere" of celebrations in the Philippines.

There are eldorous decos on Orchard Road, a street here teeming with shopping malls, yet Cang says the feeling is just different.

She says she will miss finally get together, the food, and yes, even kids singing Christmas carols.

Perhaps it is because she has just gotten in this small country, and the homesickness sets in. But it is a feeling Patricia Mendoncillo shares, even if she has been away from her family for eight years.

Working here as a community services manager, Mendoncillo, who is older than 30, says she will miss many celebrations in the Philippines.

Mendoncillo has never spent Christmas in Singapore. "I never celebrate Christmas in Singapore. It gets very lonely," she says.

Unlike the Philippines, Singapore is not a predominantly Catholic country. Mendoncillo says Chinese New Year is usually the bigger holiday celebration in Singapore.

This year, she will be spending Christmas in South Korea with some of her friends; she will main "waiting for midnight to open gifts and bring with her generations of our family."

She says she misses seeing "adults in the family get drunk, while some of the children are trying to get ripe of wine."

Of course, she will miss all the dancing and singing, a common sight on entertainment in homes in the Philippines.

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Monday, December 24, 2007
4th Week of Advent

1st Reading: 2 Sm 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16
Gospel: Luke 1:67-79

Zechariah, filled with holy spirit, sang this canticle.
"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel;
for he has come and redeemed his people.
He has raised up for us a victorious Savior
in the house of David his servant,
as he promised through his prophets of old,
salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of our foes.
He has shown mercy to our fathers
and remembered his holy covenant,
the oath he swore to Abraham, our father,
to deliver us from our enemy,
that we might serve him fearlessly
as a holy and righteous people
all the days of our lives.
And you, my child,
shall be called prophet of the Most High,
for you shall go before the Lord
to prepare his way for him
and confer his people's salvation of their salvation
when he comes to forgive their sins.
This is the work of the mercy of our God,
who raises from on high an rising sun
shining on those who live in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
and guiding our feet into the way of peace."

Commentary:

Israel has settled in his palace and thinks of building God a palace of his own. The prophet Nathan tells him in a dream that God desires that he himself will build his own dwelling place among humankind. It is God who has done everything in David's life and will give a throne that will endure forever. Through many centuries and all history, it is God who keeps true to his word, from the beginning and given Joseph and Mary every reason, including the child in his arms. This is God's way to keep true to his word to his own. God fulfills his promises and keeps his word. This is the basis for hope. It is not to praise God, with Zechariah and Mary, who thought that our God has remembered us, visited us, remembered us, and kept true to his word. We should serve him devoutly and be holy in his sight all the work of our lips and who brings the beginning, out of the darkness as they see that will be guided into the way of peace. Soon, there will come true.

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Huwag hayaang umasendar ang makina habang nakaparada.

HUWAG SAYANGIN ANG GASOLINA! HINDI ITO LIBRE!

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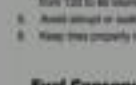
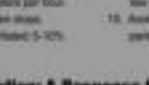
1. Fill up gas in the morning, not in the afternoon.
2. Close gas tank caps tightly to avoid fuel evaporation and spillage.
3. Avoid traffic jams; take alternate routes.
4. Avoid jack-rabbit starts and speeding. Twenty-five percent fuel savings can be realized in driving at reduced speed from 120 to 80 kilometers per hour.
5. Avoid abrupt or sudden stops.
6. Keep tires properly inflated; 5-10% savings can be achieved.
7. Reduce aircon usage especially in cool weather.
8. Do not overload the vehicle. Additional load on vehicle will increase fuel consumption especially in driving uphill.
9. Avoid engine idling for more than 3 minutes. Excessive idling wastes two (2) liters of fuel per hour.
10. Avoid reverse gear maneuvers in parking the vehicle.

Fuel Conservation: A Response to Climate Change





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Scientist explains 'Star in East'

From page A1

junction of Mars, Jupiter and Saturn in 7 B.C.

US databases

The advantage that a modern astrophysicist like Mathews has over Kepler and others who have pondered the question is that he has access to the databases of the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

"In principle, we can see any star that was ever made from the beginning of time if we knew where to look. As the question is, could we find a star that could be a good candidate for what showed up there?" Mathews says.

Mathews has found several possibilities. He begins by posing three questions when he sets to find the answer to any astronomical event: Where did it occur? What were the characteristics? Did anyone else see it?

The Gospel of Matthew indicates Jesus was born in Bethlehem when Herod was king. Roman historian Flavius Josephus notes that Herod died after an eclipse of the moon before the Passover.

According to Mathews, there are four possibilities—6 B.C., 5 B.C., 1 B.C. or 1 A.D.—when the Christmas star occurred. He says the star could have appeared up to two years before the wise men arrived in Jerusalem.

Mathews believes that means the Christmas star could have appeared anywhere from 8 to 4 B.C.—firming in with some scholars' views on when Jesus was born.

Star's characteristics

Among the characteristics written about the Christmas star was that it appeared before sunrise and that it appeared to "rest in the sky."

Mathews has found writings from Roman and Chinese astronomers of an event about 9 B.C. which described a comet with no tail that didn't move.

Using that as a fix, Mathews has come up with several possibilities, including supernovae, novae and planetary alignments.

Mathews has found two possible supernovae in the right period, but says one was probably too low on the horizon to be seen. The other supernova is known as Kes 75. But it was 60,000 light years away and may not have been particularly spectacular.

"There's no real convincing evidence that happened right at the right spot, right, so I couldn't be in the range of being right because it's in the right location," he says.

Mathews has also found a number of novae that also could have been the Christmas star. The one he thinks is the most likely candidate is

MATHEWS

known as Nova Aquilae 9103.

The problem with novae and comets, though, is that they were believed in ancient times to be a sign of disaster, not a portent of good things to come.

Time of alignment

For that reason, Mathews believes the Christmas star was most likely an alignment of planets. He said there are three likely times for this:

- Feb. 20, 6 B.C. when Mars, Jupiter and Saturn aligned in the constellation Pisces.
- April 17, 6 B.C. when the sun, Jupiter, the moon and Saturn aligned in the constellation Aries while Venus and Mars were in neighboring constellations.
- June 17, 2 B.C. when Jupiter and Venus were closely aligned in Leo.

Mathews believes the April 17, 6 B.C., alignment is the most likely candidate. It makes sense because he believes the wise men were Zoroastrian astrologers who would have recognized the planetary alignment in Aries as a sign a powerful leader was born.

"In fact it would have even meant that (the leader was) destined to die as an opposed (fate), which of course would have been significant for the Christ child, and may have been why they brought myrrh, which was an embalming fluid," Mathews says.

Saturn's influence

"Saturn there would have made whoever was born as a leader a most powerful leader because Saturn had the strength to do it, in their terms," Mathews says.

The astrophysicist has been sharing his findings in lectures at Notre Dame—the Catholic university here in South Bend, about 150 kilometers east of Chicago—and plans to write a paper to submit to the Quarterly Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society. He's also considering writing a book.

Mathews concedes, though, that any of the others events could have been the United star of Bethlehem.

THE ASTROPHYSICIST stands in front of one of his slides at the Jordan Hall of Science at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana. He gave a presentation that offers possible explanation of events in astronomy about the Christmas star. AP

Unless a document is discovered that affirms historians to more accurately ascertain exactly when Jesus was born, it will be impossible to say what caused the light with absolute certainty he says.

"I think it would take more of a historical reference more than an astrophysics," Mathews says. "There are plenty of strong opinions out there. I think this is not good as you can do for sure."

AP

Prospects dismal GMA popularity will improve

From page A1

reopening next year of congressional investigations into a number of corruption scandals on administration economic development projects.

Satisfaction rating

The youngsters of the administration turning the corner on Ms Arroyo's presidency took bottom public satisfaction rating are slim.

A survey conducted by Social Weather Stations from Nov. 30 to Dec. 3 showed that 48 percent of respondents were dissatisfied and 32 percent were satisfied with Ms Arroyo's performance, despite the point of positive to former President Estrada after he had been convicted of plunder.

The survey found that one out of two Filipinos approved of Ms Arroyo's decision to pardon Estrada, but this did not improve her satisfaction rating overall.

SWS pointed out that the President did not gain from the pardon "because those who agreed with it were even more dissatisfied." The survey said that the impact of the pardon in helping her recover her disapproval rating was fleeting.

The other survey by Pulse Asia in October showed 42 percent of Filipinos perceived the country as the "worst corrupt President in Philippine history," followed by Marcos, 31 percent, and Estrada 16 percent.

Paradox

Cold comfort for Ms Arroyo, in political terms, although she is perceived by Filipinos as "the most corrupt" President, the survey found they were not corrupted enough to take drastic steps to remove her forcefully from office. This is the paradox that stands out in the Pulse Asia survey.

When Brig. Gen. Danilo Lim and Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV staged on Oct. 29 the 34th coup attempt since the Edsa 1 thing in February 1986, the public mood of revulsion at the perceived corruption of the Arroyo administration that had been ruptured by the mutiny did not translate into mass political action to topple her.

And yet, the same survey found that three in five Filipinos (59 percent) thought a Presidential resign from office if the President "takes action against government officials or is linked directly or indirectly to graft and corruption."

Related to this result is the finding that most Filipinos "are not inclined to take drastic measures" to remove the President from office "even if they are convinced" that the President indeed wrongs or be removed from office.

Ambivalent public

More revealing, especially as coup planners, is the finding that only 24 percent of Filipinos support military coups "to do whatever is necessary (beyond public rallies and marches)," which is under usual to mean to include coups. This suggests that 8 others more than revolution or corruption to support public outrage of the scale that deposed Marcos in February 1986 (Edsa I) and Estrada in January 2001 (Edsa II).

That ambivalence helps explain why the Lim-Trillanes coup attempt at Manila Peninsula Hotel didn't catch fire in mobilizing wide public support and collapsed in a whimper. The failure to read correctly this public mood to support coup attempts is at the bottom of the collapse of most previous coup attempts, except the rising of People Power I and of People Power II.

The Trillanes coup attempt at Oakwood in 2003 was badly planned and ill-executed. The second coup attempt at Manila Ops was even worse.

Unlike the Edsa I rebellion by former Defense Secretary Juan Ponce Enrile and Gen. Fidel Ramos in February 1986 against the Marcos dictatorship, they raised no armed force and decided to die and make a stand at Camp Aguinaldo, and later at Camp Crame.

People power was no lesson there. They did not expect civilians to mass in the streets to defend them. The people power was a response to a call by then Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin. The civilian intervention was not part of the Enrile-Ramos calculation.

Miscalculation

The civilian mass turned back the Marcos tanks moving toward Crame. Marcos' commanders refused to live up the civilian human wave and Marcos feared he would go down in infamy as the butcher of the people.

Trillanes and Lim did not only have an armed force to engage against contingent. They misconstrued the people would rush to the streets to support their mutiny at Oakwood and also at Manila Ops as they declared withdrawal of support for the Arroyo administration.

Except for Edsa I and at Edsa II, people power were not in the streets to force out of office a government. They neither rushed in the streets to defend the Aquino administration nor responded to the calls of renegade Gen. Eduardo Ermita in his coup attempts.

The miscalculations and untenable assumptions of Trillanes and Lim on people power were not only responsible for the collapse of their coup attempt. These also benefited the Arroyo regime.

The stalemate for 2008 is bad for an ill-conceived and ill-timed coup attempt. The outlook for the recovery of Ms Arroyo's disapproval rating is equally dismal. Economic economic develop, unless and disturbances are a threat to her economic performance.

Young RP singing star shines abroad

From page A1

perform on the syndicated talk program, the Filipina sensation had already recorded a seven-track digital album in Australia.

Pempengco, the third placer on ABS-CBN's singing talent search program "Little Big Star" in 2006, had also appeared as a guest performer on "Star King," the reality show's first-ever homegrown stint on Israel Broadcasting System (IBBS).

In July, Pempengco inked a digital recording deal with the Swedish label Sin Sang Productions. Among the songs she recorded were "Running Up That Hill," "Sing" (her winning piece for "Little Big Star"), "I Will Always Love You," and originals "Amazing," "All The Money in The World," "It Can Only Get Better" and "Born To Love You Again."

Digital records are distributed through the founder of Sin-vache Internet directly to a personal computer.

"Because this was the case, we are now looking for a major record label to take charge of the album's physical distribution," said Annabelle Regalado Borja, managing director of Star Records Artists Management (Stream).

Two videos of Pempengco singing "I Will Always Love You" attracted the attention of Ten Songs Productions' Adie Atkinson. The first video features Pempengco...a wild-eyed contender—performing the song popularized by Whitney Houston at the 2005 AFI grand finale.

PDHPHMEGO

988,872 hits

The second video, titled "Face-off," shows a clip of Pempengco's "I Will Always Love You" performance side by side with the clip of "America's Got Talent" finalist Jessica Ryan performing "And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going."

To date, the "Face-off" video has registered a total of 988,872 hits.

In October, Pempengco received an invitation from SBS, arguably one of the biggest Korean television networks, to perform on "Star King." This was after another video—with Pempengco singing "And I Am Telling You," from the "Dreamgirls" movie soundtrack—was viewed on Youtube.

A star is born

Pempengco's "Star King" performance, as recorded on YouTube, found its way into American television when it was featured on "E! The Daily Buzz" on Nov. 14 with the headline, "A Star Is Born."

Two days later, Pempengco was featured in the E! show's "Hollywood Unreality" segment.

On Nov. 28, viewers from all over the world witnessed Ellen DeGeneres personally inviting Pempengco to appear on her show.

The award-winning Ellen DeGeneres show is an hour-long daytime talk show hosted by the comedienne-stand-up comedian and television icon. It has won over 20 Daytime Emmy Awards since its inception in 2003.

Reduced to tears

Less than a month later, on Dec. 19, Pempengco was on "Ellen," singing her ear-aigna rant show-stopper. She made more than a standing ovation. She herself was in tears as the program host hugged her.

"The performance brought tears to Ellen's eyes, too" Borja said.

DeGeneres gifted the young singer with an iPod Touch—Pempengco had lost hers en route to the studio in Burbank, California.

Before-and Pempengco had shared a touching moment backstage.

Importance of humility

Said Borja: "While on the way to their respective dressing rooms, Ellen told Charice: 'You have a great talent. You have to take care of it. You must remain humble. Be careful of the people who will be interested in you. Trust yourself and believe your heart.'"

Borja, who was with the singer at the time, said DeGeneres' words touched Pempengco. "She kept saying she couldn't believe it was happening to her."

Now, Pempengco is on her way to seven Korea and performs on "Star King" again.

Upon her return to Manila, she is set to work on her solo album under Star Records, Borja said, and will have a shot at recording the theme song of ABS-CBN's new drama series, "Habang May Buhay."

Gordon-Garcia tandem floated for 2010 polls

From page A1

Gordon, the loquacious former mayor of Olongapo City, visited Cebu on Dec. 15 to grace speakers during the launching of the Pondelfiel Star tell-on, tell-off round created by Pablo Dupping in what some quarters saw as a launching of his presidential bid and probable running mate.

The administration has no definite candidates yet who may succeed Mr. Arroyo, whose term ends in less than three years.

'GG' partnership

In a statement released by Gordon's office, Garcia, in her speech, praised the senator for "his sincerity, his passion, his competence that made him an only one deserving to lead our country."

She cited Gordon as a "presidentiable" and spoke of a "GG" partnership which, she said, stood for "Good Governance...Gordon and Garcia."

"We have our responsibility to our country and to Cebu now leads all other provinces, and as Cebu is now showing everyone else that indeed it can be done with 'GG'—Good Governance...Gordon and Garcia," said Garcia.

The governor also revealed that she had been a fan of Gordon's forceful public speeches.

"Way back, when Gordon was still mayor of Olongapo, whenever I will get a chance to listen to him on television, I will forget everything else because just listening to him truly inspires us to work and go to great lengths for the good of our country," she said.

In response, Gordon said "GG" could stand for "Gwen Garcia or Gordon-Garcia or Gwen Gordon or what anyone would call good governance."

Dynamic Cebu

The senator and Garcia herself had been scored by potential presidential candidates as a winning team, largely because of how she had transformed Cebu into a dynamic province.

The Garcia family has been credited for delivering to the President the decisive votes in her reelection in 2004 in a landslide victory in Cebu.

Gordon said the province could be the model of economic progress for the entire Philippines as he compared its socioeconomical drive "to the spirit of Lapu-Lapu who successfully repulsed the first efforts of Spanish conquest of the Philippines."

The pairing conforms to the tradition of selecting candidates for president and vice president from either Luzon or Visayas-Mindanao in order to avoid a bruising voting issue.

Although both politicians are off the radar insofar as the top presidential and vice presidential candidates are concerned, pundits believe that having four or five bets fighting for one post can give the edge to candidates backed by the administration since 25 percent of the votes is enough to win it all.

The administration is currently playing catch-up in the preparation for the 2010 elections.

Opposition candidates, mostly from the Senate, have dominated the popularity polls. They include Senate President Manny Villar, Senators Ramon Revilla Jr., Panfilo Lacson and Loren Legarda.

INQUIRER

OPINION

Source of hope

THE GREAT RELIGIONS SHARE A COMMON REGARD for the pilgrim. Indeed, the very idea of pilgrimage is central to many of them. By this we mean, not only the cleansing journey to a religious destination that the devout undertake, but life on earth as itself a pilgrim's journey. That would make all of us itinerants, travelers just passing through.

EDITORIALS

For those who share in the convictions of faith, the temporariness of life is not an utmost of despair but a sign of hope. More than a sign, it is a condition.

In the Christian view, true hope comes from outside time. Pope Benedict XVI, in his second encyclical "Spe Salvi," reminds us of two lessons of history. First, modern man learned to define hope as "faith in progress." Second, that hope has been repeatedly frustrated, by man's own ambiguous, indeed ambivalent, nature. The work of science, to give one example, can be used for either good or evil. The advance in economic management, to give another, fosters a materialistic view of human development, to the detriment of the spiritual.

In the Christian view, therefore, the hope that springs eternal has its true source outside of human experience. But this creative is not only outside of time; it is also, essentially, specifically time-bound. The birth of the Messiah the Christian world celebrates beginning tonight is an actual fact; in the Christian view, the incarnation is God intervening himself into history.

The vigorous Catholicism of writers like G. K. Chesterton and our own Horacio de la Costa taught many to see (and to welcome) the upside-down quality in the Christian faith: It is a religion of reversal, where the last shall be first and the poor inherit the earth. And where the object of pilgrimage becomes a pilgrim himself, a fellow traveler. He is one of us; He is God-with-us.

This undeserved converse is the true source of Christian hope.

Sources of hope

A TURBULENT YEAR IS FLUSHING TO AN END. THIS month's extended holidays give us an occasion to reflect on the turbulence.

Much of the turmoil was, and remains, political. The mid-term elections drew high public interest and drove a high voter turnout, but it also deepened political divisions. One public scandal after another outraged the public and at the same time confirmed it in its disaffection. The political killings continued to fester, like a cancer that has metastasized out of control. The growing unpopularity of President Macapagal-Arroyo and the small-mindedness and short-sightedness of much of the political opposition have sharpened the legitimacy issue, turning it into a two-edged sword. And to us, ad nauseam.

But 2007 was also, and eminently, a year of hope. Indeed, hopeless editors trying for Filipinos of the fear have to choose from the most inspiring lineup of choices in years.

The election of the Sandiganbayan special division convicting deposed President Joseph Estrada of plunder showed a remarkable consistency of purpose and lucidity of thought. The mid-term elections showed continuing maturity among Filipino voters. Isabela Gov. Grace Padaca was reelected, celebrity-saturated candidacies who ran early on their flame were resoundingly trounced, and priest-reviewer Among Ed Panlilio won the governorship of Pampanga over two traditional politicians, in dramatic fashion.

The Supreme Court, under the leadership of its new Chief Justice, Reynato Puno, convened an extraordinary summit to confront the grim specter of political killings that continues to haunt the countryside. In October, it promulgated a new legal remedy, the writ of amparo, which offered hope to those whose loved ones were victims of forced disappearances. Edita Burgos, whose unceasing and uncompromising search for her son Jonas, believed to be abducted by rogue military agents, provided the nation with a stirring profile in courage. And journalists everywhere, intent only on doing their job, pushed back when administration hard-liners mounted fresh assaults on press freedom.

These Filipinos, like many others toiling in obscurity, did what needed to be done. In the process, they offer hope for everyone.

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Give gifts to rescued animals through PAWS

A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO EVERYBODY, including President Macapagal-Arroyo. May the light of reason and justice shine upon you.

* * *

Convicted child rapist Romeo Jalosjos has just made a laughing stock of the President, Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez, the bench's Rebecca Pañera, and our justice system as a whole. If did-not-include officials of Bilibid because Jalosjos could not have left the premises of the penitentiary without the consent of these officials. The best that can be said of them is that they are stupendously inept.

How can a high-profile prisoner sentenced to over life terms like Jalosjos, whom no less than the President has ordered to be kept in prison, and whose whereabouts Gonzalez supposedly monitored, leave the prison, fly to Dapitan in Zamboanga del Norte in a private plane accompanied by bodyguards, without the prison officials and guards knowing about it? Be that inside a machine of the orders of the President and Gonzalez, and has shown that our justice system is full of holes. It proves the rumors that privileged prisoners at Muntinlupa come in, visit, then prisoners can go out on murder missions and return to prison at night to give them an alibi?

Former Senate Minority Leader Juan Ponce Enrile said he has already scolded the prison director, Ricardo Rapsing, for being so lax. Obviously a mere scolding is not enough. Rapsing should have been sacked and sued. But he just walked out of prison without any body accosting him. Can our prison guards be trusted or even keep pigs in a pen?

Anyway, Jalosjos' excuse in flying to his hometown was that he has been "rewarded" for "good behavior." What good behavior? Is what he just did good behavior?

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* * *

It is Christmas Eve, and if you still haven't bought gifts for friends, there is no easier way than to favor the needs and palpitations of St. Francis and the mails. Send gifts to your friends through the Philippine Animal Welfare Society (PAWS).

Here's how to do it: Instead of PAWS in the name of your friends, PAWS will take care of sending the card announcing that you have donated a certain amount in their names as gifts and doubling them and you for your thoughtfulness and kindness. Easy, ya'ha? No hassle, no palpitations, no traffic. PAWS' telephone number is 4627580. Donations are payable to PAWS, by the way, is tax-deductible.

Your donation will be used to feed and take care of abandoned animals rescued by PAWS and kept in their rescue centers. There poor animals are rehabilitated and assisted to be good family pets and offered for adoption to responsible families.

If you want a dog or a cat for pets, don't buy puppies or kittens from breeders. They are not only expensive but also encourage breeders to mass produce them for profit. Look first at the pets offered for adoption by PAWS.

When you get a puppy or a kitten, you don't know how they will look like and behave when they grow up. But when you adopt adult dogs and cats, you can already see how they look like and behave, what you see is what you get. Also they are guaranteed to be healthy and have been neutered or spayed before they leave. PAWS will not allow an animal to be adopted if it has not been properly trained even if you want it.

* * *

Kapihan Notes: There will be no Kapihan in Manila (Mondy) and Florida (nun's outing; Christmas Eve; and New Year's Eve. The next Kapihan and lunch will be on Jan. 7, 2008.

* * *

TODAY'S JOKES: There will be no nativity scene this Christmas in Congress. They can't find those who have not a right from sitting in members. So there are enough seats to fill the aisle. The house has offered other animals as well, like crocodiles, snakes and wolves.

* * *

From a Christmas homily for congressmen: Hold on to faith; it makes things possible.

Hold on to hope; it enables us to be positive.

Hold on to love; it gives meaning to life.

Hold on to GMA; she gives money at the Palace.

As I See It

Neal H. Cruz

What Jalosjos has done is show that he does not deserve executive clemency. The President should withhold use it. If she has the power to give clemency, she also has the power not to, and no withholding what she has erroneously given.

Gonzalez said he has ordered the arrest of Jalosjos, but then softened it by saying that the authorities must also protect him "since he might be injured some time while his family is there." What? Is not any prisoner who leaves or spend some time with his family run with out of prison sentence and go home?

The latest word is that Jalosjos, when arrested, will not be taken back to Bilibid but confined in a Zamboanga jail. That's like throwing a turtle into the river.

In San Jalosjos can elevate a party in jail and invite his supporters and they can eat, drink, fornicate and make merry and it would be just like old times. Happy times are here again! That's the current way to reward ago other prisoners to also escape.

What Jalosjos deserves is the butterbut, just like other escaped prisoners when recaptured. And he should be served not only additional jail term just like other escapees. He deserves more pleases. Can the GMA administration live this down?

* * *

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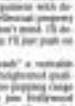
Yo ho ho

There's the Rub



Gwendolyn de Quiros

THIS YEAR, SANTA CLAUS IS OR MIGHT THE fellow in a redsuit performing the feat of defying gravity in his overweight state, with the aid of backpack and company, and taking him-self down the chimney. Or he could be bringing presents for kidding pals. He is a trendy fellow then, a straight brand and a push in one eye, with or without a parcel on his shoulders, looking not unlike Johnny Depp in "Pirates of the Caribbean," sailing with the merry aureole of the dead behind him and exclaiming, "Yo, ho, ho," before being "Yo ho ho."

I haven't been to the pictorial fairs for some time, and were there shortly after I came back from abroad. I was bowled over by a means de-vulgarity. It wasn't merely that fairs and their products were overwhelmingly tacky and the charge of an phenomenon early this month was vastly entertaining); the volume of the trade had grown to leaps and bounds. It's probably the fastest-growing sewage industry in the country and the one that's most labor-intensive). It's also true, more than the quantity, the quality of the offerings has taken a quantum leap.

You'll still find the usual stuff that sells for a song but is just as unnecessary as one; the kind that reminds you of the early Beatrice tapes-ordered that that's not a necessity but a luxury-talking underwater. Or where the subsidies read like the manual in a made-in-China appliance, which I suspect is expressly written to secure the English grammarian. That is especially true of Steve Forbes's Hollywood movies if you have a cat in those sets, he or she will readily appear you on the face-"Would you like, sir"...but still often made it to a "slow copy" to is in fact neither one nor the other, but you'll be well advised to steer clear of between the swamps of "time" with a reader willing with the wrong avenue of the Goods.

You'll still find that stuff, but you will find interesting titles, and that is the real treasure trove. I don't know where they're coming from, but they grow new ones that are surprisingly clear. I suspect they were copied from the original DVDs' but augmented as by single-layer World War II; Lindsay Anderson's "if," a classic of my generation along with "Here I Go" (that for me I've had for a long time); Ken Schlatter's "The Business Party"; Gilo Pontecorvo's "The Battle of Algiers."

The last I was delighted in that, having been looking for it for some time. I have "Burn" and "I," and the "The Battle of Algiers" completes the three favorite movies of my earlier days). I have

Rule of law, not rule of money

IT IS A GRAND FOOTRECOGNITIVE PERIOD THE presidency of a responsible big business organization like the Federation of Philippine Industries with its one-man-three-votes formula of interest has been passed into the familiar controversy over the distinguished line, "It's big business for the money to do what it wants to do—but it should be the law." Or, in the more usual set of the law's favorable Scope that, for a business does not qualify for the rights manifesting of the federation. If he does, the rule of law in the Philippines is in real trouble.

The controversy developed by President Macapagal's Executive reversing the conversion order on the liquidity property for from being a signal that the rule of law will not be followed (as claimed by Federation of the Federation) or is but a signal that business, no matter how big, will abide by law. Whatever the reading of the FPI should show how to fact it is all down hearing the few rules to come. This is, after all, what big thinking big business wants.

Recall that under the Agrarian Reform Law the farmers had been granted Certificates of Land Transfer (CLT) over the lands of the haciendas of the Regalos of Iloilo. But big business, under a promise of an ambitious development of the land, persuaded that the land be converted instead to agro-industrial uses. The farmers opposed the proposal but were unable to stop it in court. The basis: set law. The CLOA which had been granted to them was taken back.

Helpless, the farmers united in the expectation that they might after all benefit from the conversion to use. In the end, however, the farmers took and that they had been had.

The Department of Agrarian Reform, hoping to ensure that conversion promises would not run out simply as a ruse to get the failing land reform, had imposed a condition on the original land conversion that it should complete one-fourth of the total five years to lose the conversion right.

SOUNDING BOARD

Fr. Joaquin G. Bernas, S.J.

The triumphant big business did not even begin the conversion. Under the law, this was found by revocation of the conversion order. Then the President did what she had to do. She ordered the revocation of the property to original use. As the authority charged with the responsibility of implementing the law, the President did what she had to do.

In the meantime, however, the original deed expired and title to the land reverted to the farmers. Under the law, the conversion to the original purpose is bound to follow the terms of the approved conversion. The necessary big business, for reasons of its own, chose not to follow the terms of the original conversion order and so never realized the different purpose. Where is the rule of law here, Mr. farmers?

The President's EO has created the process of making a long standing legal wrong. It is an issue of justice to the farmers. The rule of law. Will big business cooperate or oppose it? Mr. Secretary might. I doubt that others will.

More than five years ago, President Fidel V. Ramos acted to modify the conversion order he had approved and granted limited areas to the land reform land to a "selective" solution. Under that solution Ramos authorized the conversion of 616 hectares to agro-industrial use and 200 hectares for agricultural use by farmers. But big business opposed Ramos and the Supreme Court, on technical grounds, did not allow Ramos to change his mind.

If the Supreme Court had been more broad-minded then and had allowed the conversion of the property of appeal, as in fact Associate Justice Puno (now Chief Justice) and Associate Jose Vitug wanted to, just how much we would not be having to-day's problem over money.

But there is some credit due Indays. We can now remember.

When President Ramos declared that the Sandiganbayan is a court of under land reform, Malacañang points to others. The declaration, however, is not a law's magic wand. Before the farmers can really win what they have been fighting for, there still are obstacles to be hurdled. In this context, the statement of a distinguished Filipino comes to mind.

He should not underestimate what the President can do. The DAR is under her control and the powers of the DAR are really her powers. She can speed up the process, all strikes like law, even if the farmers are not organized.

Who can oppose the big men? Big business, it's decent to, considering the agony of the farmers. The DAR estimates about a year before everything is completed. But if big business chooses to oppose the legal rights of the farmers all the way to the Supreme Court, it will be a long wait for the farmers.

And it will be David against Goliath. Goliath will not come out standing down.

In the interest of hope, however, it is not impossible for big business, specifically Jose Miguel Roxas, to cooperate in letting this end a sad of law prevail and perhaps help in forging a voluntary win-win solution. I am convinced that most of my fellow Filipinos who know Roxas would applaud the hope of Roxas. I can write to tell you Mr. Roxas ing of Jose Miguel Roxas said. But the millions of the underprivileged turned not be achieved via big business now. Let the little people do the talking. Let the farmers—just for once—be the ones who have become responsible and let their labor the law on their side!

A Christmas message

KRIS-CROSSING MINDANAO

Nuruljen Mimbalgbe

TRADITIONS HAS EVOLVED BY THE CHRISTMAS message of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo that I caught on ANC's Gig night. If we to the audience of her speeches and pronouncements there you have to be a psychologist to read it.

So in this season of kindness and goodwill I thought I would let her in on share with you something I did not write myself (honestly there are so many times that I myself receive emails my own suggestions, and in the context of kindness and goodwill, I which I am passing on especially to all leaders and politicians who are not only women of goodwill. It is, I believe, as excellent Christmas message as any that I have received this year.

This is an excerpt from a communique written presumably between 1300 and 1100 B.C., and here it got down to us as an inscription on a tomb. Obviously, the author was a man of the people. Gudea, or perhaps Gudea, refers to Lac Tzu or Lao Kiun of the Tao, as he is usually called—a contradiction that is not accurate in Roman translations. But modern research, especially those done and by archaeologists in countries in Asian Minor, has established that Lao Tzu lived in 604 B.C. about the time prophecies of Daniel, when the book was first published, and certain references in the text herald those that could not have been written by "servant of their time, or written to Delilah," as Gudea put it, or Gudea.

The most logical conclusion, it appears, is that it was written by Amenhotep II, Pharaoh of Egypt, or by some of his successors in the "great period" of expansion of the Egyptian Empire. It is known that he received the priesthood teachings and idol worship of Egypt and established a monotheistic, mystical religion. In the history of religions, he is considered the first to make the claim that God is personal God to you—Jehovah (what he says God), and he has been called "the greatest moderator of all times."

The original from which the English translation was eventually made was written in the Tibetan language and was discovered by Nicholas Notovitch. He was there in the temple in Dhiza, the manuscript had been in his possession since 1333 A.D.

In 1742 the emperor of China was a scholar of antiquities to the Grand Lama residing permanently in Peking. He was interested in the "Christ" and had the text translated into Chinese. He was also interested in the "Christ" and had the text translated into Chinese. He was also interested in the "Christ" and had the text translated into Chinese.

"His engagements are great, his attention is severe and his heart is wrapped in the deepest interest. He is the author of the laws, and they flourish, else it is in vain expected to forestall the ordinary of his hand.

"He is the learned and the wise, the friend of the learned himself, he kindleth in their breasts emulation, and the glory of his kingdom is exalted by their labours.

"The spirit of the unchristian who contradicts his words is darkened, and he shall be brought to nought his hands; the judgments of the mouth, the improvements of the ordinary, all these he honoureth with his favour, in accordance with his favours.

"He planteth new colonies, he buildeth strong fortresses, he maketh the waste places habitable. He honoureth learning his colony; but people diminish in riches, and the strength of his kingdom is exceeds.

"He honoureth his ministers with equity and wisdom; his subjects enjoy the basis of their labour and they are happy; their happiness consists in their observance of the law.

"He bounteth his judgments on the principles of merit; just, in the punishment of offenders, he is not in favour of the innocent.

"He exerteth not cause to the emphasis of his talents; he sees towards the hand of their appearance, and he knows beforehand on a man's.

"His people distributed, look up to him as a father, with reverence, and they also consider him as the guardian of all they enjoy.

"Their affections unto him begetteth in his breast a love of the public; the servants of their kingdom are the objects of his care.

"No manner is against him arise in their hearts, the uncleanness of his enemies endeavor not to vex.

"His subjects are faithful, and him in his consider would in his defense, as a wall of brass, the army of a state. Such fellow them as to shall believe the while.

"Security and peace bless the dwellings of his people, and glory and strength encircle his throne forever."

A very Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year to all my readers. Thank you very much and God Bless!

Joy is a toy

THE LONG VIEW

Manuel L. Quezon III

THERE SEEMS TO BE A CONSENSUS THAT Christmas starts being 100 percent fun after two weeks of the season. Before that, it is people trying to impress relatives and Christmas parties from adding stylish and tacky to cheer and give to more friends and family, too. A home-made card described well on dribble in a most won't do.

I myself have a deadline-induced excuse: inspiration usually goes but gains by the time I talk to (or her), when I look a life of unbridled luxury, when my die had on a child. She passed. I could see the sadness in her eyes. She thought that I was not interested in making an effort to please or that maybe she was not my best friend. She was wrapped, when two decades, she turned to me and said, "I don't like presents."

"You know," she said eventually. "I don't remember."

"Oh," I said, disappointed.

"But," she said, perking up, "I remember this."

"What?" I inquired, with a couple of metaphysics.

She smiled, turned to me, and said, "I had plans!"

And so we ate, quietly for all of five minutes, savoring the subsequent conclusion that we had no plans.

But a child, regardless, can quickly, unmoor us more of Christmas present, frilled, of course, a present system, imbued with so much desirability that a piece she had begging quite for the entire year.

Which is why I am glad that I am not the Santa Claus Federation's current figure. (At least she could be accommodated into my long-term expectations. It may teach an oldster of years early that I have people who tells me to should managed that, years later, I would be a better person for it.)

The thought, for every years of summer finishing home in the mall, triumphantly bearing a Japanese video panel but with his own colony of Christmas cards. I am sure that I would have a process—and was a busy enough not to play with it, but instead, keep it in its box, to be branded inclusion until he or someone proves.

I wonder if there ever is to be of thrill once and for all. Is there a point in life when—when—you're in life an inside out or the privileges of childhood—a dumpster incentive or immediate gratification over the leverage that accompanies

Merry Christmas, senior citizens

FIRST OF ALL, LET ME GREET THE ALABANG SENIORS Golf Association (SGA) led by Atchie Lucon after a most enjoyable two-day golf tournament—mostly in the rain—at the Alabang Golf and Country Club. While we didn't do too well with golfing (I myself had a new game where I swinging the old rule and putting each to another notion of golfing happiness with the determination to score that elusive hole-in-one.

REVERLE

Ramon J. Farolan

Also I would like to congratulate the Cavite Agricultural Seniors Golf Association led by Glyde Pomarat for successfully over-and-tournament which is for the annual dance of many senior

politics, civilian and military, led by AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Hermogenes Esperon Jr. and former President Fidel V. Ramos. Before this go to Agricultural Club manager Ney Ochoto for the many improvements of the course, especially the remodeling of the golf course to the delight of the senior players. We hope to see more of these improvements in the months ahead.

After high on my list of golfing events during the past few weeks was the annual Philippine Navy Golf Tournament, which came to have evolved a fantastic evening capped by the Member's Ball Ribbon. The grand prize was a Toyota Fun which originally was offered as a hole-in-one promotion. Since a winner was due to the tournament, the Navy decided to raffle it off during the awards night. I don't think any golf club in this country has been able to match the Navy in this. Congratulations to Navy Golf Club Admiral Valmores, chair of the Philippine Navy Golf Club.

Incidentally, for golfers and other athletes who may be suffering from sprains, bruises, contusions or similar injuries because of sports activities, there's a young sports-orthopedist here who specializes in muscles and blood vessels. Miguel Belo is his name. Truth to be told, he is one of the successful treatments of all kinds of ailments associated with our muscles, tendons and ligaments.

Miguel is the son of Jose Soriano del Prado, 2 La Salliite now running the family empire in Negros Occidental. He is also the grandson of Jose del Prado, a classmate of former AFP Chief Lt. Gen. Angel Ilarde. Miguel, in the Philippine Military Academy, finds belongs to the class of 1981. Miguel probably has the same email address as some sugarcoated@yahoo.com. You can check him out if you need help in Tel. No. 8888397.

The Christmas season, we thank the Almighty for the healing breath of this gifted magazine.

* * *

For most of the year, I have been discussing in this space the various benefits that have come our way in senior citizens. Sometimes among them has been the 20-percent discount that we have in the purchase of medicines and meals in a restaurant. So far, we have made steady progress in securing a greater awareness of the laws governing these matters, but we still have a long way to go for the full enjoyment of what is called for in the Constitution as far as senior citizens are concerned.

Today, I would like to turn away from these harsher and contentious in order to focus on some of ideas that crash on our lives in senior citizens. We may have some senior these in different ways, possibly in the "Ten Commandments" of senior citizens, as to who the three who are old and obese.

Let me first start on just a few of these as food for thought during the holiday season.

1. Let's face it and accept the fact that we are getting old. That has consequences and is neither to our loss from or adjust in view of our limitations. We can mean about aging as we can rejoice in the wonders that goes hand in hand with experience.

The comedian Lucille Ball looked at things from a different perspective. Instead of thinking in terms of getting old, she focused on the asset of getting young. She said, "But to care of wanting young is to live honestly, not slowly and to choose your age."

2. Plan and spend what you've earned. Yes, there's no reason to in the few books for years left in your life. Travel if you can afford it. Don't leave anything for your children or loved ones to spend after. Instead of hedging, you can even leave more trouble after you're gone.

During a visit to Europe, the United States, I picked up an interesting book, entitled "1,001 Great Things About Getting Older." Here's a chapter on "Why You Don't To Yourself To Die First." It is written from the American viewpoint, but some of the thoughts are applicable to all of us.

Many people behave as though the purpose of living insurance is not to have to die. Others are so afraid of dying as to assume that their grandchildren will be able to do business close to their funeral. This behavior makes no sense. Why save that more so that you can be wealthy when you're dead?

"Here's what you should do:

"• Cash in your life insurance. You invested your life when you were young because you were worried that your kids might not get to college if anything happened to you. Well, nothing happened so you and your children all have degrees. Now is the point, since have accumulated nothing about paying you back. So, dump your policy and invest those premiums in the funds you're available.

"• Don't save for your children. You don't want to sell your house, rent it from an asset into a liability. Take out the biggest loan you can, set aside just enough to cover the monthly payments because more and your retirement fund of stock, bond, mutual, spend.

"• Live from hand to mouth. If something or to your diamonds, your children will inherit them off before your estate is cold. Sell everything now and spend the proceeds on stuff that you cannot drink deliver to you.

"• Enjoy your life with your spouse, children, grandchildren and friends. Forget how you for yourself, not for what you have to them. Give them but what you have, they will just be a source of misery for you.

"• Be honest death. Prepare for life. Don't be afraid of it. It's the beginning of a new and better life. So prepare yourself, not for death, but for tomorrow life.

Forrest Church from the Unitarian Ministerial made the following comments before his death due to prostate cancer. "The best of death is certainly unrecognized. We need to have the humility that in death, we are in the company of countless others and that death is the only certain destiny that awaits us all. I am not merely just occupied with death, but rather by the opportunity it represents. It is unchangeable? Don't possible. If it is not, then what a great adventure lies ahead."

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Duterte showed ban can work

MAYOR RODRIGO DUTERTE IS our local government executive whom other local officials would like to emulate but, sad to say, can't. So their bitterness, fueling the persistent smear on the charismatic leader of Davao City, Mayor Duterte showed that he could excercise political will.

Unfortunately, but that he will again ban the sale of firecrackers and pyrotechnics to prevent the loss of lives and damage to limbs and properties. More importantly, he will again purge the streets of Davao of beggars and the national lord's reshuffle will also be able to exercise the political will to ban the use of firecrackers.

Let us all have a really happy and blessed Christmas season.

—JESSE A. CURILAN,
Executive Director, Prosperity, Unity, and Love,
jesseacurilan@yahoo.com

Balikbayan searching for wife's relatives in Leyte

I HAVE BEEN AN AVID READER of the Inquirer ever since I returned to the United States. I am 82 years old and worked in the government for almost 20 years. I am a World War II veteran waiting for the approval by the US Congress of the proposed law on equity rights and the supposed recruitment of our veterans from the Philippine government.

I like the Inquirer for its balanced reports and for publishing letters for or against the government. But I like the Inquirer more for its editorials and the opinions of all its columnists. I spend almost half of the day reading the Inquirer. I enjoy reading the Inquirer because I get from it the more important news about politics, business, sports and entertainment. I hope the Inquirer will always inform the readers what's really happening in our country and what our rotten politicians are doing. More power to the newspaper and its staff.

Also I hope that through the Inquirer, I could hear from the relatives of my deceased wife, Asteria Tibaga Cruz, in the town of Inopacan and Carigara, Leyte. Should they read this, I hope that they contact me. I want to visit them there so that they will know that my wife died on May 13, 2007 in Long Beach, California.

—RICARDO V. CRUZ,
2112 Barrera St.,
Ayuntia Village,
Project 8, Quezon City

Is US Embassy staff playing with Filipinos' feelings?

I HOPE THIS LETTER GETS TO the eyes of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice or ambassador Kristie Kenney.

In mid-June my other wedding anniversary, my wife and I, together with a retired, childless couple (our relatives), decided to apply for a US non-immigrant visa. Our interview was set on Sept. 13, 2007—10 a.m. for us, and 11 a.m. for our relatives. In our application forms, we wrote the same common points and addresses, our relatives's brother-in-law is a US citizen residing in Harbor Gate, Barnacchi, California.

We were interviewed by a female consul who was very cordial. After a couple of questions to me and my very serious wife, she gave us two yellow slips which, if you are also interviewed in the embassy, was a sign that you passed.

She told us, "Your visas are approved, please proceed to the 3rd floor," the cashier/shopping which delivers passports stamped with US visas, and pay the corresponding delivery fee. My heart nearly leaps off my chest! I shouted in my mind, Penang-Pasko! Gary-Valentine!

Jonathan Jaspeldon! Go feel free! Followed by Saul Jasmin! Gin Nalzaro! Gin Larsen! Darren Bona and my crush, Bai Sita (8 all of them)!

After imagining myself going to those two sites in the United States, I told myself, I can do with a smile in my face after which, We proceeded to Delfinos to paid the corresponding fees, then went back home to Tarlac City.

Unknown to us, our relatives were interviewed by the same consul. The consul noticed that our applications meant the same counter person in the United States. They later told us that they were scheduled to the anti-fraud section of the embassy because we had the same counter person. The question to it is illegal. Consulates or have the same contact person, more fresh to our taxpayers' permanent application forms? The visa and passports were given back to them and told that their visa applications were denied and withheld and neither were they disapproved.

We brushed this incidents aside and excitedly waited for our visas. The Delfinos courier arrived but ours are opened the package, there were no visas in our passports and it contained blue forms telling us we were denied!

The courier told me that in his five years with Delfinos, it was the first time to deliver a denied applications. In the form, there are boxes beside each of the five possible reasons for denying an applicant a visa issuance but it is a copy of the reasons exists, the box beside it was supposed to be marked with an X. Not one of the boxes found in our forms was marked with an X.

Our lifelong dream of visiting the United States was suddenly back to being just a dream again. It is OK for the US Embassy to feed around and play with people's minds and hearts! Telling them their visa applications have been approved but on reading them a secondary notice? Try denying our fellow Pinay, Delfinos nonsense and that forms is found reasonless of what we suffered in the hands of the US Embassy consular section in Manila.

—HERNANDINO L. FLORES JR.,
HRD Aquino Subd., Tarlac City

LETTERS

Calamities can't cover up scandals

THE SENATOR DAVE SAYS HIS new motto: Optimism Leads and Wins provided the public some relief from the cruel reports about a number of irregularities that implicated the corrupt administration. President Macapagal-Arroyo must have relished the opportunity to project a concerned image to the still-publicized preparations in the wake of the typhoons would hit any part of the country.

Some part of a typhoon month metaphor is the third option in response of typhoon "Mina" J. Mina by three avenues of the preparations was covered by government radio and TV networks, reporting her CBMS conversations with the government and subsidized broadcasters in the other.

In "Mina" (name) caused the North, 1000 infected the present because of her Pagasa (PAGASA) Dely Pagasa's (actual) his weather forecasting. Despite online have been on the buying list of Pagasa (formerly the Weather Bureau) for 40 years, since the watch of Dely no female Rizalist who will give international recognition to his contributions to meteorology. What more could he have accomplished if he had a properly equipped organization?

And there was the Marina bombing, like the Glorietta 2 explosion a month earlier, bagging the headlines for several days and filling the air for many weeks and, nevertheless to the facts of reckless-arrogant Philippine politics.

Still, these incidents must have been a welcome diversion from the fatal, leaked scandals that are now too embedded in the public consciousness and cannot anymore be obliterated by natural calamities like typhoons, tsunamis, earthquakes, political mass murders, or even "high crimes."

—E. T. ESTANISLAO JR.,
42 Dalisay St.,
Philamlife Village,
Pamplona, Las Piñas City

FVR spoke on Peninsula takeover

RE REPLY TO THE NEWS STORY "Give, FVR warn, Soup sidelined, says he'll wait and see" in the Nov. 30, 2007 issue of the Inquirer, which reported that former President Fidel Valdez Ramos refused to comment on the then unfolding developments in the Tuliani takeover of Peninsula Manila.

Please allow me to correct the erroneous report, as since I got on Nov. 20, 2007, FVR was at the Grand Ryan Hotel where he was guest of honor and keynote speaker in the International College of Surgeons (Philippine Chapter) Annual Convention, after delivering his address, he was interviewed by MBS anchor Noel Novales on the Peninsula Manila "Interview."

FVR strongly condemned the coup attempt which he said, would not succeed and not work, as our being always engine change or reforms. He also said that such course of action (already said by the Sukwood rebels unsuccessful) in July 2003) would only hurt the economy, with millions Filipinos being the ultimate victims and losers. The interview was in fact aired by MBS several hours during the day and is preserved in this network's record.

—ATTY. REX B. SALIAS,
Legazpi, Bagacay

Bleak future seen in children's choice

THIS IS ABOUT THE TOP 10 TV programs and personalities given the Asahi TV viral.

If our children, our country's hope of the future, indeed prefer occasional news and crime/police stories, easy-money game shows and gossip melodramas, then our future looks bleak. It is so shocking to note that the personalities chosen were "news readers" and popular show biz stars/personalities.

Does that say anything about the kind of values our children have? Or, more importantly, what they will follow their elders.

May God bless the future of the Philippines.

—JUDY GUZMAN,
judeGUZ@lycos.com

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As we celebrate our 20th anniversary Inquirer greets 20 more readers their wishes... here we wanting and like reading you could add to a complete one like celebrating your 20th anniversary or a parent's event. Let us know what you really want in 200 words or less. Join us.

1) How long have you been reading the Philippine Daily Inquirer?
2) What do you like most about the Inquirer, and we wish not, what do you like least?
3) What is your number 1 wish that Inquirer can grant you and why?

INQUIRER

Across the NATION

LTO orders audit of luxury car deals

By Jaime R. Balanon
Inquirer Visayas

CEBU CITY—THE HEAD OF THE LAND TRANSportation Office in Central Visayas has ordered an audit of all transactions by its field offices in the region, particularly the registrations of imported vehicles.

Acting on reports that many of the 61 expensive European-made cars seized in a Mabolo City auto repair center last week came from Cebu, LTO 7 director Alex Lepasana said he has tasked the LTO Regional Internal Audit Division, headed by Inspector Bobbie, to inventory all the transactions of the regional office.

Lepasana said he wanted to know if indeed luxury cars imported from Europe were being given new registrations by his office.

Lepasana, however, said he could not comment on the allegations that LTO officials were in cahoots with persons involved in the illegal importation and underregistration of European luxury cars.

But he admitted that some officials of Presidential Anti-Smuggling Group (PASG) raised issues with his office in September to ask for documents covering the registration and registration of some brand-new vehicles.

Lepasana said PASG officials were crying in vain by the Certificate of Payment (COP) of importation tax for brand-new and high-end cars suspected to be either underevaluated or fake.

"It's possible that the CP could be fake but LTO officials could not easily ascertain if these were underevaluated because it is the customs officials who issue these documents. As long as the applicant for registration has complied with all the necessary requirements, it is ministerial on our part to grant the registration," he said.

Lepasana said the audit would also address the claim of Cebu Auto Dealers Association that smuggling of luxury cars has become rampant in Cebu as evidenced by the almost 20,000-difference between the number of vehicles registered by the LTO in the region in 2006 against the number of cars sold by legitimate dealers over the same year.

Cebu customs district collector Sirredin Behinsan yesterday maintained there was no basis for PASG to say that many of the 61 luxury vehicles it seized in Mabolo came from Cebu.

Behinsan, however, said he would welcome any investigation.

"They are talking nonsense. We all smoke. They can check our records here. Even before I assumed office a year and a half ago, we could see all those luxury vehicles plying in the streets of Cebu. I was even sitting where all those vehicles came from? Since I assumed my post, I have been very strict to the requirements and we had apprehensions," he said.

Jerry Heyer, assistant director for Public Information Office of PIRA, said they have recovered several documents such as the OR indicating that the luxury vehicles they raided in Mabolo actually came from Cebu.

Peter, however, declined to further comment on the issue since they still had to complete their investigation.

Actress' lawyer says Pulupandan mayor still in the country

By Carla P. Gomez
Inquirer Visayas

BACOLOD CITY—CONTRARY TO REGLAIM, Pulupandan Mayor Magdalena Pelin and his 3-year-old son have not left the country, reassured the Bacolod City prosecutor's office.

Lawyer Evelyn Gwen, legal counsel of movie actress and television host Marie Roxanne "Thelly" Sevin, told the prosecutor that the Bureau of Immigration has certified that its last record of Pelin leaving the country was in 2002 yet.

Pelin, 32, disappeared along with his young son soon after the Supreme Court Third Division ordered him on Dec. 3 to return his son to Sevin, the child's mother, pending resolution of their bitter custody battle for the 5-year-old boy.

Under Article 176 of the Family Code (Illegitimate children shall be under the sole custody of their mother, the Supreme Court said.

After the National Bureau of Investigation marched the house of Pelin in Barangay Obay, Pulupandan, Negros Occidental for the second time on Dec. 20 to look for the boy, Pelin in a telephone interview, told reporters that he and his son were still in the country.

But the BI has no records showing that Pelin and the boy have left the country from Jan. 1 to Dec. 16, 2007, Uyana said.

Motion

Evasco said the 10 days time given to the NBI to find the boy lapsed Saturday and if they still fail to find him, she will file a motion before the SC asking that a warrant of arrest be issued against Pelin.

"We will also ask the SC to cause a hold departure order to prevent Pelin and the boy from leaving the country and to order the local government officials, as a lawyer, Pelin is clearly defying the law," she said.

The order to turn over the child to Sierra states that it was immediately executory, which means that it could no longer be submitted to a motion for reconsideration as claimed by Pelin, Uyana said.

The conflicting statements of Pelin on his and the child's whereabouts appear to be meant to confound, she said.

"We believe he is still in the country and he is within easy reach in hiding, or the NBI is not doing its job," she said.

The house in Pulupandan is the last place he would be in, she said.

"I do not believe the NBI cannot locate him. If they cannot, they are admitting that he is more clever than them," Uyana said.

Evasco said they also would want to find what the NBI has been doing since to find the child after they failed to search on Pelin's house in Pulupandan.

NBI Bacolod chief Manuerva Gomez yesterday also said he strongly believed Pelin and his 5-year-old son have not left the country.

Gomez said he does not believe Pelin is in Negros but could be in some other part of the country where he owns property.

HOLIDAY SPARKLERS
City folk in Davao del Sur rush to buy firecrackers sold anywhere in the streets despite warning by local authorities. More vendors are expected to have a midnight display of their wares on Christmas Eve.

American living in E. Visayas dies of AIDS, says DOH

By Joy A. Cohiles
Inquirer Visayas

TACLOBAN CITY—A 55-YEAR-OLD AMERican who had Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) died in early December, the Department of Health in Eastern Visayas disclosed Dec. 20.

Dr. Nicholas Bandoja, chief epidemiologist of DOH in the region, however, declined to give details on when or how the foreigner contracted it.

"The mayor [of the town] where the American lived does not like to make a big issue out of this death. That is why he does not like to give information about this. But what was certain was that [the American] died due to the AIDS," Bandoja said.

Bandoja said they were able to confirm that the American was a victim of AIDS through his medical records.

However, he could not categorically say if the American died in a hospital or at his house, where he was living with his Filipina wife.

Bandoja could not also say if the victim's remains were shipped back to his country or were buried in the locality.

"But I say that, most probably, he got the disease while abroad and then, when he returned to the country, he was already sick," the chief epidemiologist of the DOH-8 office said.

5th in Eastern Visayas

Bandoja said the DOH is monitoring the Filipina wife of the AIDS victim to determine her health condition.

The death of the American made him the fifth person in the region to have died due to AIDS since it was first recorded in Eastern Visayas in the early 1990s. The regional health office has reported that 18 persons have been afflicted with the disease in the region since it was recorded.

Republic Act No. 8504, which sets the policies and guidelines on AIDS in the country, defined the disease as a "condition characterized by a combination of signs and symptoms, caused by the HIV contracted from another person and which stimulates the afflicted individual susceptible to other life-threatening infections."

Aside from sexual intercourse, the disease could be spread through blood transfusion, sharing of intravenous needles and donating semen.

December 1 marks the annual observance of the World's AIDS Day that has so far killed 2.1 million people since it was discovered in 1984, data of the United Nations World Health Organization AIDS Epidemic update revealed.

The DOH-8 has been urging local government units in the region to establish an AIDS council, which could help disseminate information about the disease and to lessen addition cases like the "Filipina" attached to it.

In Leyte, the Leyte Family Development Organization is doing its information dissemination campaign about AIDS.

Top cop plays Santa to 'Tagaytay 5'

By Marlon Ramos
Inquirer Southern Luzon

CAMP VICENTE LIM, LAGUNA—While they won't be home with their families and friends this Christmas, five fathers detained here on suspicion of having committed rebels got one of their heroes' wishes—spend more time with their loved ones even inside their detention cell.

After being subjected to apparently strict jail security since their arrest and incarceration more than a year ago, the five inmates, now collectively known as "Tagaytay 5," have been allowed by the newly appointed director of the Calabarzon police to be visited by their families during weekends.

In a recent interview with the locators, Chief Supt. Hermilo Padilla said he had ordered commanders of the three Police Office in this camp to respect all privileges given to prisoners, including their rights to outing and visitation rights.

"These five detainees are humans, too. Their rights should be respected," Padilla told the locators.

The five detainees—Antonio Sarmiento, Rex Phaller, Raul Custodio, Axel Pinpin and Michael Mesinco—have been jailed at the 2D motor custodial jail here since May 2006 after they were arrested in Tagaytay City for supposedly planning to bring down the Arroyo administration.

The five were held incommunicado for at least a week before they were eventually charged for rebellion.

They have been incarcerated since their arrest, being arraigned.

Some time during the year, their police guards only allowed them to see their visitors on limited time on certain days.

Dialogue

Padilla, who took over the helm of the Calabarzon police force retired Chief Supt. Nicasio Rañeses Jr. on Nov. 8, visited the detainees at their cell last Dec. 18.

He visit was prompted by a letter sent to him by the prisoners who wanted to have a dialogue with him.

During the visit, Padilla told the detainees, Padilla made it clear that the Calabarzon police had asked Tagaytay Regional Trial Court Judge Edwin Lutilla, the judge handling their rebellion case, to transfer them to a regular jail facility but their request was not yet been granted.

"This is just a temporary detention cell. This is not meant to have prisoners like you for a long period of time," Padilla told the detainees.

He then quickly reviewed the concerns of the prisoners' handwritten letter dated Nov. 22, which centered their desire to have a better prison condition.

Swiftly, Padilla allowed five of the 13 requests made by the prisoners.

Aside from allowing them to see their visitors on weekends, he let the five to have their beddings inside their cell.

Instead of constructing a visitor's area, Padilla ordered the police guards to allow the five to talk with their visitors inside the jail.

Padilla, the first police general who visited the five, also instructed the guards to allow the five to have their regular conjugal activities and ensure that they are regularly given medical attention.

He, however, turned down the appeal of the Tagaytay farmers for an increase in their daily budget for food from P40 to P70 and refused to say regarding the speedy resolution of rebellion case filed against them.

"That's already beyond my power," he said.

Sarmiento said they were thankful for Padilla's decision to order his men to adhere by what the constitution afforded prisoners like us."

He said what Padilla consented to were actually the same issues they fought for when they held a 40-day hunger strike a few months ago.

Sarmiento added: "We just hope he will do what he promised us."

POLICE and rescue workers help the victims in the wreckage of a bus that skidmed into a boulder when it broke malfunctioned in a highway in Tuba, Benguet.

1 dead, 6 hurt in Benguet road accident

BAGUIO CITY—A BUS DRIVER of a university in Bicol was killed while at least six others were hurt on Sunday when their bus hit a boulder along Marcos Highway in Tuba, Benguet, police said.

The bus, registered to the government-run Camarines Norte State University in Legaspi City, was carrying 52 teachers and students, two drivers and two relatives of one of the drivers, but only six were confined for various injuries at the Baguio General Hospital and Medical Center (BGHMC) here.

Reports from the Tuba police said Jose Emmanuel Rojas, the driver, was already dead when rescue workers reached him.

The Manila-bound bus, according to reports, was cruising along Marcos Highway near Barangay Bantouy in Tuba when Rojas lost control of the vehicle at about 9:40 a.m. The bus' right portion hit a mountain boulder before it overturned.

Investigators had yet to determine what caused the accident.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development here said custody of Rojas' 4-year-old daughter, April, after the accident became her mother was among those confined in the BGHMC.

Benedicto Bilandres, city tourism officer, said the group attended a two-day seminar at the Benguet State University in La Trinidad town.

"Rojas was a bank-up driver. This was a caravan of four buses from Bicol and they were here for a state college seminar," Bilandres said.

In Mt. Province, a stretch of road where nine people died in an accident last month was closed last week when elders held a cleansing ritual to prevent more accidents there.

The elders from Bontoc town performed the ritual, called "pangdaka," along the Sagada-Bontoc road because accidents had often occurred there, according to Thomas Killip, provincial assistant for Cordillera affairs.

"The ritual was meant to ask the spirits along the road to remove or prevent any misfortune occurring in their environs of the road," said Killip, a former mayor of Sagada town.

Killip, a resident of Sagada and Besao towns stopped plying the route to allow the elders to perform the ritual.

On June 26, nine people were killed and nine others were hurt when a jeepney fell into a ravine in Barangay Dapdapayan in Sagada. Eleonor Cabreros and Desiree Cellana, Inquirer Northern Luzon

Villagers flee homes in Sulu, Maguindanao

THOUSANDS OF VILLAGERS FLED their homes as fighting flared during the past two days between government troops and several Islamic secessionists in Sulu and Maguindanao, killing a Marine soldier and an undetermined number of rebels.

The 2nd Marine Brigade suffered its lone casualty in an encounter on Dec. 22 with about 40 rebels belonging to the Abu Sayyaf group and a "rogue faction" of the Moro National Liberation Front in Kabingkalong Cotong town in Sulu.

Another soldier and at least five civilians were wounded in the clash Tuesday in Barangay Pandaypandan, Brigade commander Col Cesario Alcaraz said.

Alcaraz withheld the identity of the slain soldier but named the wounded Marine soldier as Cpl. Wilmer Amarik.

Brig. Gen. Ibrahim Kaldel, commander of the antiterrorist Task Force Comet, said the rebels injured were civilians used as shields by the retreating rebels. The civilian hostages were later released.

Pursuing troops, backed by air and naval reinforcements, encircled seven rebel and assorted ammunitions, leading them to believe that the rebels suffered "heavy casualties," the officers said.

In Jolo Pang, Maguindanao, thousands of Moro inhabitants from at least five villages left their homes after hostilities broke out between militiamen and members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on Friday.

Lt. Col. Julieto Anolo, spokesperson of the Army's 6th Infantry Division, said reports of casualties have yet to be determined as dozens of houses were torched by the rebels, reportedly led by a Commander Dimasimarite.

The MILF, which is talking peace with the government, agreed to a ceasefire in 2002. Malaysian-backed peace talks, however, recently broke down. —John S. Alpasin, Ed General and Charlie C. Delhaze, Inquirer Mindanao

AKTA KIDS IN BAGUIO
Mendicancy and charity appear to wait every Yuletide season, encouraging indigenous Filipinos to visit the summer capital in December.

Kids wish parents home by Christmas

By Nestor P. Burgos Jr.
Inquirer Visayas

ILOILO CITY—MAY WAS DOMINA, 16, a busy wrapping gifts for her cousins and relatives in time for Christmas.

She will also accompany her younger sister Ismara, 15, to the mall to buy presents.

For the first time, she is taking care these tasks for her family.

They do not know if her mother, Maria Luisa Pana Dominado, will be home for Christmas. But they hope so.

Her mother has remained incommunicado for eight months after she and fellow activist Nilo Ibada were forcibly taken by heavily armed men in Barangay Calaudanan in Dao town in Iloilo on April 12. Their companion, human rights worker Jane Ilo (not their real name) was also abducted but was left behind.

The victims' families said local leaders have been unwilling to cooperate with the search for the victims, saying they are afraid to antagonize the military.

Amita Dario's disheartening tale is the story they filed in court. May Was said it has also been difficult acting as a mother to her sister.

She said it would have been hard or if her mother had not trained her to be independent especially when Dominado was detained for several years for rebellion charges during the Aquino administration.

But her mother's absence is felt by the whole class.

"Because was the main organizer of family gatherings. She always found a way for us to be together," said Mary Pearl in an interview in Pototan after she attended a court hearing on the petition for a writ of amparo filed by the victims' families.

Despite being always busy with her work in the victims militant organizations she was involved with from organizing farmers in Pototan and Janiuay towns to campaigning for the party-list groups Bayan Muna and Anakpawis or meeting with former political detainees, Dominado had time for family gatherings.

Mrs Was said her mother would assign tasks and responsibilities for family gatherings held on special occasions like Christmas and New Year as the Pana family corresponds Jan. 1 to Dec. 31.

"Her absence is felt because it's hard to fill her role," said May Was.

Amalia's sister Rosemarie, 36, said her husband moves failed to come home every Christmas Eve despite his busy schedule.

As regional chair of the militant Bayang Alyansang Makabayan and secretary general of the farmers group Pamanggas, Ibada was frequently set home as he was always attending meetings and leading campaigns for farmers' rights on Negros Island.

"But he came home for Christmas with toys and clothes for our son Khaled Marshall," said Rosemarie. "We don't give gifts to each other anymore because it's all for our son."

She said Nilo would stay in their house in Bonnagan town in Iloilo until Dec. 26 when he would be out for work again until Dec. 30 for the New Year's Day celebration.

DM, who turned 7 on Dec. 22, has also stopped asking for toys and cash Christmas presents.

"He only asks that his Papa will be home," said Rosemarie.

She said each day that her husband remained missing, it has become more difficult to answer their son's questions.

"He always asks if his Papa was still coming home and if my going to Cebu City to attend hearings will bring him back."

"As long as we have our friend there, we will not lose hope," Rosemarie said.

Suspect in Aklan radioman's slay yields

By Nestor P. Burgos Jr.
Inquirer Visayas

ILOILO CITY—A SUSPECT IN THE 2001 murder of Aklan broadcaster Rolando Uerta surrendered to the police on Dec. 18, three weeks after another suspect was arrested.

Jessie Tejar said he would surrender to the police during an interview aired over radio station DYRF of Radio Mindanao Network where Uerta was program director before he was gunned down in Jan. 3, 2001.

Tejar added Aklan would stay in their house in Bonnagan town in Iloilo until Dec. 26 when he would be out for work again until Dec. 30 for the New Year's Day celebration.

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Cordillerans abroad ready to fund Ifugao scholars

BAGUIO CITY—CORDILLERANS BASED abroad are willing to send Ifugao youths to school should they decide to stay home and maintain the upkeep of their ancestral rice terraces.

Organizers of the International Igorot Congress (IIC) are holding the group's 7th conference in Ifugao in 2003, and are beefing up its cultural educational initiatives to help keep the Cordillera's world-renowned "living artifacts" alive, said Ursula Bunoy, Benon School principal and IIC secretary.

Young Ifugaos have been leaving the province, leaving no one to maintain the centuries-old rice terraces that their families own, said Ifugao Gov. Teodoro Baguilat Jr. in a speech he read before an environment conference at Chiang Mai, Thailand, last month.

Abandonment and the conversion of the rice terraces in favor of a more lucrative livelihood are threatening the existence of the heritage landscapes. The outmigration of educated Ifugaos and farmers posed a big problem to the continuity of the cultivation of the terraces and maintenance of the ongoing (community bonds)," he said.

"Some rice fields are being converted to residential and commercial areas due to the increasing population of the province and the influx of tourists while some change their rice crops to vegetables or rice and vegetables alternately," he said.

The Batad and Bangaan terraces in Banaue town, the Hagabgab terraces in Hungduan town, the Mayoyao terraces and the Monolopao terraces were inscribed on the list of World Heritage Sites by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco).

But those were also included in the Unesco's list of endangered heritage sites after the government abolished the agencies tasked with maintaining the terraces.

Participants in the 6th International Congress of Tourism, said Dr. Ramon Obusan, Ifugao provincial administrator, said the IIC is studying how local officials there can remain in projects.

He said IIC's primary goal is to restore the dignified image of the Igorot to the world, and to direct its resources on tangible programs like saving the rice terraces.

Bunoy said the IIC has been interested in Ifugao's radical approach to keep the youth interested in maintaining the terraces.

> 'The outmigration of educated Ifugaos and farmers posed a big problem to the continuity of the cultivation of the terraces'

One such approach is to open alternative courses for which the IIC scholarship programs could be redesigned and readjusted, she said.

Baguilat said the Ifugao State College of Agriculture and Forestry (Isaf) has been forming local artisans to teach indigenous knowledge to students interested in farming, woodcarving and weaving.

But he said alternative programs, such as those started in Isaf, need to be subsidized until they begin to arouse interest from Ifugao residents.

The IIC is also interested in how the government has progressed in fulfilling indigenous Filipino rights, Bigalbal said.

Cordillera autonomy, for example, is a constitutional requirement that the government has not yet accomplished because it failed twice in securing the ratification of laws creating an autonomous Cordillera region, he said.

Vitaver Cabreza, Inquirer Northern Luzon

Ilocos town plants coconut for coco diesel plant

By Frank Cimatu
Inquirer Northern Luzon

BAGUIPUD, ILOCOS NORTE—Sub District Hosp. Rep. Salacnib Baterina what his Christmas tree is and he will answer: the coconut.

In fact he as least consumes that he has initiated contact planting in a 500-hectare government land in Barangay Lacsapat here.

It will indeed be a Christmas windfall in a few years, for the coconuts will feed a $250-million coco diesel plant to be built either in nearby Pasuquin town or in Currimao town.

Seventy percent of the coco diesel produced will be exported to Japan starting in 2010, Baterina said.

But the former lawmaker, is will be the fruit of lifelong obsession with coconuts.

He answer the Sta. Energy Northern Luzon Inc. (Benlin) runs when he was congressman. His concerned memory was located in Sto. Domingo, Mr. Isnormeon, in Ilocos Sur.

"Nobody believed me when I said that I would be planting coconuts across Northern Luzon," he said.

"They said that the conditions in Northern Luzon are different from Southern Luzon where coconuts abound. The weather here is more arid and drifted with one half of the year dry and the other half rainy. But then we proved them wrong," he said.

His obsession with coconuts rubbed on with the other politicians in the North.

"I didn't know how to plant coconuts until Representative Baterina taught me," said Ilocos Norte Rep. Roque Abaya Jr.

Baterina and Abaya got in touch from Japan as well as the end of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

In October this year, Benlin inked an agreement with the Tokyo-based trucks Biofuels Inc. (TBI) to set up the plantation all over Northern Luzon.

Motoaki Hayashida, TBI president, said Japan would need about 2 million tons of coco biodiesel every year since the Japanese government implemented a 5 percent biodiesel mix to regular diesel.

"The factory we are planning here would be producing 300,000 tons every year starting the end of next year. That volume is only enough for one government ministry in Japan," Hayashida said.

He said they contracted Benlin Inc to provide a steady supply of coconuts for the plant.

"Eventually we would be needing 600,000 hectares of coconut plantations for this," he said. The PH would be funding the upkeep of these plantations.

Hayashida said they were already using about $400 million for the project. $250 million for the plant and $150 million for the plantations.

Abaya said they convinced the PH to consider Northern Luzon because it is the nearest to Japan.

"They would be saving at least 60 percent of fuel cost if they locate here," he said.

Abaya said they also convinced Mr Arroyo about the project. She ordered Environment Secretary Lito Atienza to provide them with a list of idle government lots in Ilocos Sur, Cagayan Valley and even Apayao in Cordillera.

So far, the Department of Agriculture said Navarro Region has identified at least 65,000 hectares of idle lots in those areas.

"In this way, we are not only helping in the government's reforestation project but also in clearing the air of greenhouse gases," said Ilocos Norte Governor Imee Marcos, for example, is a devoted eco-activist Benlin decided to be its pilot site.

Philippine Coconut Authority regional manager, Dencio Cabili, said they would target 2.5 tons of copra per hectare.

Iloilo journalists spend time with women, youth offenders in jail

ILOILO CITY—MEDIA PRACTITIONERS here took time out from news gathering and reporting to spend time with the women and youth offenders at the Iloilo City Bureau of Jail Management and Penology.

For the seventh year, the Iloilo City Hall Press Corps (ICHPC) gathered in making the jailed inmates and women feel the warmth of the Yuletide season.

The gift-giving activity and Christmas party with the youth inmates in the pre-prevent of reporters covering City Hall.

"We must let them feel the presence of Christmas and we hope that the boys and women (from the community) despite the offenses they committed," said ICHPC president Lydia Perdido.

The ICHPC parted with 57 inmates. Games, fun, laughter and lunch were shared.

Most of the women inmates face charges for violations of Republic Act No. 9262 or the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002, illegal recruitment, (unnamed) murder, and other crimes. Theft is common among juvenile inmates.

Christmas like personal hygiene stuffs and foods were given to each of the inmates courtesy of 101 City Rolls, Unilever Philippines, Iloilo Kansas Youth Association, and officials of the city government. (Jamil Israel Sinag, Inquirer Visayas)

CHRISTMAS IN ABRA CAPITOL
The Yuletide season is a peaceful time in Abra, its capital in Bangued has been decorated with the Nativity scene and Christmas lights.

World's largest floating library goes to Subic

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—The Filipino youth will be the focus of the world's largest floating library. MV Doulos, used in 258 Christian volunteers when they return after six years in the Subic Bay Freeport on Dec. 28.

Olga White, Doulos project coordinator, told the reporters that their donor would be "Days to Remit."

"In less than 10 to 500 of our volunteers from the world over will browse with the Filipino youth through music, dance, drama and life stories to inspire them to dream. It will be like a journey around the world," she said there last week.

Doulos said the event, which invited youths from various parts of the Philippines and called the Doulos International Night, is set on Jan. 11 at the Olongapo City Convention Center.

While berthed at the Subic Bay's Alava Wharf until Jan. 31, Doulos will receive guests to browse through its library that carries more than 6,000 books titles and hundreds of film and music videos.

Doulos, owned by the German charity group Gute Hoffnung Für Alle (Good Books for All), has sailed to over 150 countries since 1978 to "bring knowledge, help and hope to the nations."

The ship, the medium through which the volunteers reach people from across the globe, is actually 93 years old or four to five times the age of its volunteers who are between 18 and 25 years old, Wiebe said.

Built in 1914, Doulos had been rebuilt and reengineered twice to make it the oldest ocean-going passenger ship in the world, she said.

After serving as a freighter ship, refugee carrier and cruise ship, Doulos is now converted into a floating library to promote education and international understanding in Latin America, Africa, Europe, Middle East, Asia and the Pacific.

The library is open 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays and 2 p.m. to 9 p.m. Sundays through Mondays. Rosette Orejola, Inquirer Central Luzon

For information, contact Olga Wiebe at (63-9) 536-6668 or e-mail at doulos.subicbay@gbcships.org

Writer seeks funds to send kids to school

By Vincent Cabreza
Inquirer Northern Luzon

BAGUIO CITY—CORNETTE JR AGARI BY vague like Palarde, as a motivational book author is using the season to rally his "Godsakto" in the city to consider spending "a little more" to send 10 million children in their "small acts of heroism."

Lawyer Alexander Lacson, author of the best-selling "Small Acts of Heroism: 12 Little Things Every Filipino Can Do To Help the Country," spoke to business management students of the University of the Cordilleras on Saturday to explain the movement's "good citizenship."

Lacson said Filipinos could aspire for righteous leadership or support the local economy by buying Filipino products.

But he offered them a new initiative, which involves sending scholarship funds for out-of-school youths that would cost them no more than P480 of their monthly allowances.

"If each of us can shell out P480 a month, one of those 10 million students can go back to school. If we can send five million of the out-of-school children back to school, we would have made a difference," he said.

The initiative could not be expensive, he said.

Some foundations in the country only require less than P1000 a month from donors to keep scholarship programs active, Lacson said.

He said there are high school students who have been encouraged by their teachers to help out as they spread P480 each to keep students they do not even know in class, he said.

Lacson, who is secretary general of the political party Ang Kapatiran, said educating everyone is one way of changing the country's fortunes.

He told his audience that Filipinos today suffer "the sins of bad governance," and must exert all efforts to change their lot.

He said everyone "is partly to blame for not doing enough for this country."

He said he was once a victim of racial profiling when he and his wife were stopped by border guards on a trip to Italy.

He blamed the government for pushing Filipinos in their position abroad.

Lacson said Shiloh Basik workers would show that the Philippines was highly respected in the host countries in only 20 years ago, and its people were cited as the region's most respected citizens.

Everything went downhill after the 1960s, however, and four presidents since the 1986 People Power Revolution have not been able to reverse the country's economic and social deterioration, he said.

Lacson, who also marks for a global development organization, said despite the current administration's rosy portrait of the economy, the number of poor families has doubled between 1906 and 2007.

The 10 million out-of-school youths acknowledged by the Department of Education, he said, belong to this sector of society.

Clark airport guard returns $10,000 to Korean

CLARK FREEPORT—HONESTY IS A REAL virtue for Ronald Alfonso.

On Dec. 9, he turned over to his supervisor the $10,000 that he found at the pavement of the mall-arrivers' area of the Clark airport. He scrapped the envelope where he works as a security officer.

The bundle, which consisted of $100 bills, was later claimed by a Mun Kyeong Chul, who arrived from Incheon, South Korea, aboard an Asiana flight.

Alfonso, 36, did not crow about his deed.

Policemen, who happened at 12:30 a.m. on Dec. 9, has remained recorded in the files of the security office.

But the hour on Alfonso's act of honesty, talked about by his colleagues, has reached Victor Jose Lacsina, DMIA premiere and chief executive officer.

Lacsina said DMIA executive vice president Alex Gangcuangco on Dec. 20 asked the DMIA union to approve an increase of Alfonso's salary of P18,760 monthly or possibly a rank promotion to security officer 2.

He was due to receive a certificate of commendation during the company's Christmas party on Dec. 28, Gangcuangco said.

ALFONSO

"We are humbled by the selfless act of one of us, for he has answered before the community the culture of honesty, service, integrity and efficiency we are inculcating in the institution," said Lacsina.

Alfonso appeared and sounded nowhere at the attention he has been getting.

"Iyon po kabuwanan (The money does not belong to us)," he told the inspectors when asked why he returned the money.

"They are our guests so they should be treated with respect and honesty," he said.

He said he did not have second thoughts about returning the money.

On duty that night as traffic enforcer, Alfonso gave the money as soon as Allen Gil Medina, his inspector at the landside operations department, for safekeeping.

Even as he has been working at the DMIA for 12 years, Alfonso has not built a house for himself. He still lives with his parents in Barangay Dapdap in Mabalacat town and supports them and his relatives.

His aim at the DMIA is Alfonso's first job after abandoning a business management degree at the Holy Angel University.

Some of his colleagues continued to buzz him about the opportunity lost from being honest.

Hanuan la mo. Ikaw da rin ing gesto ko (They're just leaving me. They also appreciated what I did)," he said. Nonette Orejas, Inquirer Central Luzon

NEWSBRIEFS

Poor get food gifts

DUMAGUETE CITY—The city government here gave packs of foodstuff to almost 1,000 poor families on Dec. 20.

Each of the families received from Dondy government through the city's social welfare and development office, a package containing rice, sugar, coffee and canned goods in the gift-giving activity held at the Dumaguete Public Market Complex.

Dr Dec. 17, about 1,000 poor children were also treated to a meal by the city government.

City Administrator Commander Dumalag Jr. said the city government spent almost P1 million for the two projects. The amount, he added was taken from the funds generated during its fiesta and Charter Day celebrations last November. Rosey Alvarado, Inquirer Visayas

Cops arrest 5 Manalo falls

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—Police authorities in Malapaman City in North Cotabato nabbed five armed bandits, who allegedly attacked a police military outpost on Dec. 19.

Chief Insp. Leo Ajero, Malapaman City police chief, identified the arrested suspects as Edin Balagapat Lobi, 45, of Barangay Bulmi in Magpet; Sherlo Cotabato; Ronel Lumbayao Lamla, 37, of Barangay Bonak in Magpet; Noy Lasdao Asis, 38, of Barangay Sambulawan in Makilala; Nor'N Cotabato; Nono Balasato Goata, 36, of Barangay Badiangan in Arakan; and Ponce Singgay Bantac, 33, of Barangay Salapayan in Malabang District in Davao City.

Ajero said during the attack on the Datu Inggal outpost, Pfc. Pedro Peralta, the detachment commander, and a civilian, were wounded.

Edwin O. Fernandez, Inquirer Mindanao

5 hurt in grenade attack

COTABATO CITY—Five people were injured in a grenade attack in Polangui, Maguindanao on Dec. 18.

Col. Dickson Hermoso, commander of the Army's 7th Infantry Battalion, believed the attack was politically motivated because the victims were supporters of a mayoral candidate.

Hermoso said investigation showed that the explosion was caused by an M-79 projectile fired from Barangay Inug-ug to Nad by PMC Cobrador, whom armed followers of an election opponent are suspects.

Edwin O. Fernandez, Inquirer Mindanao

Job fair in Mauzon

MAUBON CITY—A job fair was held in the city Friday, capping this year's employment program of the Department of Labor and Employment's employment program in Eastern Visayas.

Labor Regional Director Portia Pagaran said the job fair was the last of at least 25 such activities conducted in the region in 2007.

More than a hundred jobseekers flocked to the Magsaysay Covered Court here to seek employment and apply for passport and a National Bureau of Investigation clearance for free. Jan Escaler, Inquirer Visayas

A. Echano, 72

MR. M.JR. Alfa Echano of Tiaol, Camarines Norte died on Dec. 22 of brain tumor. She was 72 years old. She is survived by sisters Elisa Briano and Trinidad Madrigal and brother Oscar and nephews and nieces.

She was cremated yesterday afternoon at the Loyola Memorial Homes crematorium in Guadalupe, Makati City, after a ceremony mourning her 72 years of service as a practitioner and teacher of meditation at the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University.

Her ashes were brought last night to Tiaol where another rites will be held in her honor.

SPORTS

(CHAPS) Tim-ot Tiu, Lucio Rueby challenges the defenses of Talk 'N' Text big man Ali Peek

Realtors make it five straight

By Jane Hacaroz

THE LAST TIME STA. LUCIA REALTY strung together straight victories, the team went on to win its first and only championship.

Memories of those glorious moments flickered to life last night when the Realtors escaped with a 92-91 squeaker over the Talk 'N' Text Phone Pals in the Smart-PBA Philippine Cup-12 Bo Lanuza duel in the...

"That's a good statistic but in this one, for me, it will be difficult to accomplish," said Sta. Lucia Rueby coach Boyet Fernandez, whose Realtors moved up to 5-6, just half a game behind Red Bull (5-5).

The other bid remains in the league, however, came to a halt as the 24 coach Coca-Cola's record when five games remaining stay with 1-10) (5-win) in their other games.

Path-making coach Johnny Tan unreasonably rolling the dunes, the Express threw a stifling Full-court press throughout the second half and converted the 23 turnovers of the Tigers into 23 points.

Coach Ric Rentoy missed the game to be reportedly went to Sta Isabel to be formed to Lion City to attend to pressing family matters.

Arwind Santos tallied 25 points and had 14 rebounds while Pumaski De Ocampo added 14 points and 10 boards for the Express, who appeared to be 6 after holding a four-game skid.

Ato Ibañez had another awesome performance of 23 points and 15 rebounds as the ninth debut of the Tigers in 25 games.

Sta. Lucia Realty won five games in a row to the start to taking the 2004 Governors Cup, the Realtors' only breakthrough season since joining the league in 1993.

The winning streak came with 16.6 left by an Dennis Espino, who split his shoulder off an Ali Peek foul after a stiffy fired by rookie Byron Pinero inside the paint.

With 2.5 Orlo left, the Phone Pals dropped one from inside by when save Jimmy Alapag driving to the boulder and stuffing who looked like an easy layup at time expired.

Alapag's Jam clinched Talk 'N' Text of a fourth consecutive victory and left the Phone Pals still in 8-7 card.

"Our objective at the start of the conference was to keep sure that top-1-5," said Fernandez. "Since that we've been, I see nothing wrong if we stayed in the top two spots and eventually qualify for an outright semifinal slot."

A breeze for Es Twenty Six

By Marcus B. Cuello

CARMONA, CAVITE—OUTSHADOW, shone By Twenty Six exploded from the middle of the pack under Jessie B. Guce yesterday to take the Grand Presidential Derby for trailing away at the Sta. Lucia Lanuza Park here.

The buy filly by Principality out of Play By Eric made her move at the proper time and left everyone fighting for the crumbs as win the P2.6 million big prize, easily the biggest in her career.

"She was really primed for this race," Guce, a multiple stakes race winner, said in Filipino after Es Twenty Six covered the 2,000-meter race in 2 minutes and seven seconds broken down in 24-1/2, 23, 27, 25 and 27-1/2.

It was the third big win of the year for Es Twenty Six, who now looms as a top pick for the Horse of the Year award. She also won the Grand Leg of the Triple Crown series and the Manila Breeders Cup Mile race.

The race was also the 11th in 14 overall starts for the four-year-old Cozzi-trained filly.

Longshot Legendary Journey cut to the duels for the finish under Patty Dilema after second place worth P1.200 million, while the heavy favorite second-stayed Henry D' Eight, another hot pick, was third a neck behind for P550,000.

Tournament Ark, another filly ridden by John Gochuico, was fourth for P300,000.

Second pick Golden Haven Lifestyle Farm's run MVS, while outsized entry Bolivar Doyle Court rallied to a fifth with spot, fueled for Second (R. Hipolito), Final Rank (Rolvin Abolio), ETA Magic (Jonathan Jovier), Miscellaneous (F. Mercantile), and Storm Signal (E. Blancaflor) rounded out the order of finish.

Meanwhile, Famous super horse Real Spicy wrapped out of a big stamp-stellar by rallying the Phils to out Your Bird bewildered over the highly-favored Harter Land.

Limits guided the Real Quiet out of Epiny Tale out on a one-length win over the heralded Raquel-pulled Notre Land, having Left All for the mile and virtually rolling Pharos Land's hopes for the throne of the Year award.

In turns, mounted by no Jonathan Hernandez, was third about three lengths off, with Vivats, who was handled by Louie D. Ballesa, finishing as fourth.

BY TOP CHOICE

Aplus METRO

Editor Boots G. Dipasupil

DID YOU KNOW

ON DEC. 24, 1941, President Manuel L. Quezon and Vice President Sergio Osmeña left the seat of government in Manila after Japanese forces attacked Clark and Philippine cities. Together with American General Douglas MacArthur, the two departed for better-defended Corregidor, intending to transfer the seat of power there.

Cyril J. Jiandoni, Inquirer Research

POLICE RAID ON STL FRANCHISE HOLDER'S OFFICE

Mayor, 3 execs cleared of raps

By Jeannette I. Andrade

THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN has cleared Quezon City Mayor Feliciano Belmonte and three other local officials of the charges of grave misconduct and oppression filed against them by a company which was given the franchise to operate small-town lottery in the area.

In a 14-page decision, the Ombudsman said that Belmonte, business permits and licensing office officer in charge Avelino Magbanua Jr., Office of the Assistant City Administrator assistant Rodolfo Olmedoja and former Quezon City Police District director Chief Supt. Hermilio Barbosa acted in good faith when they arrested officials and employees of Benchmark Acquisition International Corp. during a raid on March 22, 2006.

A total of 63 collectors and operators were rounded up when the police raided the STL local office on East Avenue and three of its outlets in the city. The Benchmark officials were invited for questioning but were released after a few hours.

Those arrested were later charged with violation of Presidential Decree 1602 or the anti-illegal gambling law and city ordinance SP-91 for operating without a mayor's permit.

According to the Ombudsman, Belmonte's order for the conduct of the raid "appeared regular, reasonable and consistent with the ambit of his power under the local government where in this respect, government officials are presumed to perform their functions with regularity and strong resistance."

Belmonte had insisted that he was against the illegal numbers game, adding that STL is another form of "jueteng" which has no place in the city.

In dismissing the case against Magbanua, Olmedoja and Barbosa, the Ombudsman said that the officials were merely following Belmonte's order which appeared "reasonable, lawful and within the authority" of the local chief executive.

Man kills boy, injures 2 men

By Allison W. Lopez

A 7-YEAR-OLD BOY WAS KILLED WHILE two men were injured when a man reportedly high on drugs went on a shooting rampage in Tondo, Manila, Saturday night.

Jose Pablo Pineda, a student of the Magat Salamat Elementary School and a resident of Gagalangin Street in Tondo, was killed while being treated at the Mary Johnston Hospital for a gunshot wound to the collarbone.

Injured were Jose Marco de la Cruz, 37, a freelance cabaretan who was shot in the back and Alfredo Abar, 47, who was hit in the arm. The victims said the suspect, Edmundo Santos Jr., were neighbors. Santos, 30, immediately escaped after the incident.

According to PO2 Rommel del Rosario of the Manila Police District's Homicide Division, Pineda's father was drinking with his neighbors when Santos passed by. One of those drinking, Teodoro Legada, told the police that he invited the suspect to join them.

Legada added that Santos, who seemed high on drugs, later started showing off his gun and then, without any warning, fired at the people around him.

Neighborhood store starts a holiday tradition

By Prexy B. Hernández
Contributor

THESE DAYS, IT IS NOT UNusual to see a crowd in front of the tiny and obscure Dominican Bakery on the corner of San Jose and Santisburg Circle streets in Antipolo City.

Curious motorists and pedestrians who are not familiar with the place soon find out that the people just want to buy a particular kind of money from the store.

What makes the bread—in eye-catching animal shapes—a crowd favorite?

Holiday treats

Bakery owner Zenaida Dominador said her customers have made these animal-shaped breads part of their Noche Buena (Christmas Eve dinner) and Media Noche (New Year's Eve feast) fare.

Named after the rooster king, Dominador's kebon ak Noche—light brown and crusty on the outside and soft and chewy on the inside—is a favorite because most customers use it as a centerpiece on the dinner table.

"It is a cheaper substitute for roasted suckling pig," she said in jest. "The biggest chicken, which is the same size as the real thing, costs only P150 and the smaller ones, from P50 to P75 apiece."

Because of the high demand during the holiday season, large-size animal breads are available only by order placed at least three days in advance. Dominador has hired extra labor working 20 hours a day in two shifts to cope with the numerous orders.

Another bestseller is her crocodile bread popularly called bawgya, a bit among kids who like to boast that they eat crocodiles for breakfast.

Some of Dominador's customers have started the tradition of giving the boksn de

BAKERY owner Zenaida Dominador and her baker, Jun Orong, show their holiday bestsellers: The rooster de leche and bawgya.

ESPECIALLY made for people with a hankering for lobster ...

... or crab meat.

WHEN given as a gift, the turtle-shaped bread (left) signifies adaptability and new opportunities. The octopus-shaped bread (right) is another favorite among bakery customers.

ko, bawgya and pagong (turtle) as gifts to symbolize their wish for the receivers.

The pig, for instance, symbolizes thrift and prosperity; the crocodile, strength and stability of emotions; and the turtle, adaptability and new opportunities.

The idea of making animal-shaped breads came about when Dominador's eldest son, Raniel, was working as a baker for an aunt in Tanay, Rizal. As Marjuni (relative who owns it) see Raniel tried to sculpt a crocodile from a lump of dough. Pleased with the result, Raniel experimented with other animal shapes with success.

At that time, Zenaida was working in Kuwait. Convinced that a sari-sari and bakery store would be a wise investment, she asked Raniel and her other children, Christine, Dominic and Roel, to put up one in a vacant place in Antipolo City.

A big hit

They bought an oven, a roller machine, trays and other baking equipment with her dollar remittances. Their bakery prospered, especially the pan de sal, monay and animal bread, soon dished with the neighbors.

"When I came back in 2001, I was surprised at the number of customers not only from the neighborhood but also from other places. I felt happy that my children had used my savings well," Dominador said.

She decided to stay in the country for good to help run the store. Raniel, who had gotten married, soon moved out and opened another bakery in Taytay, Rizal.

Before branching out, Raniel trained a relative, 22-year-old Jun Orong, as his replacement. Today, Jun and other helpers make no less than 3,000 pieces of pan de sal a day and handcraft all other specialties, including the animal breads, cheese balls and pinais.

"Not a few bakeries have attempted to duplicate our products, but they have failed to produce the same quality," Dominador said. "But our foolhold has remained strong."

Her sweetness: Good product quality, a lot of hard work, perseverance, a good measure of creativity and goodwill and "keeping God in our thoughts all the time."

MOMENTS of the high demand for the bakery's animal-shaped bread during the holidays, orders have to be placed three days in advance.

Citizen's call

0918-8985566

SUN VALLEY GATE A SAFETY ISSUE

Wilfredo Cordero, president of the Sun Valley Parkview Homes Homeowners Association Inc., writes: "A gate was built at the corner of Sta. Ana and Benedictine Streets in Barangay Sun Valley, Parañaque City without a permit from the City Building Office. Motorists and passersby are outraged because the gate is located on a blind corner, with the guardhouse on the sidewalk and the gate and fence occupying one carriage way of the road. The city mayor's offices have not taken any action to stop the construction despite numerous complaints from all sectors, including the homeowners and the Sun Valley Tricycle Operators and Drivers Association. They want a resolution now that the gate has been completed. How can this be when the life of every motorist and passerby is at risk? There must be no compromise on safety issues."

Illegal water connection in Manila

LETTER may San Andres Bukid cor Otsuka Highway near Building 8, mayroe pong illegal connection ng tubig. Sa mismo 7 a.m. at tanghali pong mga 4 ng hapon, tigil ang mga residente. Kaysahan kasi sa mga amin ang tubig sa pamamagitan ng limang kapit sa poste nakabahagi. Pero ngayon, ang ibang kapit ay pinutol na ng Manila Water sa Otsuka Highway, near Building 8. Wala kaming mga

Al-Qaida group confirms death of top figure

BAGHDAD—AN AL QAEDA-LINKED group in Iraq has confirmed the death of Abu Maysara, a top operative who the US military said was killed in a clash last month, according to a statement being posted on the Web on Saturday.

Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, leader of the Islamic State in Iraq, lauded Maysara as "a martyr who was a scholar and a mujahid [holy war fighter]," on the audio tape posted on Islamist websites.

The US military said earlier in December that Maysara, a Syrian, was among nine senior al Qaida members killed in November. It described him as an adviser to Baghdadi, also known as Abu Ayoub al-Masri, and his chief preference Abu Mustafa al-Jaziri.

Baghdadi called on insurgents to keep fighting during the current Eid al-Adha feast, when Muslims sacrifice animals.

"May God accept your sacrifice, and may they be the uprooters of the Awakening Councils, who are servants of the Crusaders," Baghdadi said, referring to US-backed neighborhood patrols who fight insurgents.

An increase in US troops, more efficient Iraqi security forces and neighborhood patrols organized by mainly Sunni tribal chiefs have been credited for a decline in violence and a fall in civilian and US military casualties in the past two months.

The tape's authenticity could not be verified but was posted on a main Islamist website often used by insurgent groups and the speaker sounded like earlier recordings of Baghdadi.

While the Iraqi wing of al-Qaida remains at the forefront of many groups fighting US forces and the Shiite-led government, supported by Washington, its fighters have faced growing opposition in the Sunni areas of Iraq where they operate. Reuters

Former British PM Blair converts to Catholicism

POPE Benedict XVI poses with Britain's then-outgoing Prime Minister Tony Blair (right) during their private audience at the Vatican on June 23. AFP

LONDON—FORMER BRITISH PRIME Minister Tony Blair has become a Roman Catholic, church officials said on Saturday, ending widespread speculation that he would switch to the faith of his wife and four children.

But as Catholic leaders welcomed Blair into the fold, immediate questions were raised about whether the 54-year-old had now outmaneuvered his liberal views on controversies areas like abortion, gay rights and stem cell research.

A spokesperson for the leader of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, Cardinal Terrence Murphy O'Connor, said Blair had been "received into full communion with the Catholic Church" in a private Mass on Friday night.

Murphy O'Connor, who took the ceremony, praised the conversion of Blair, now the international community's special envoy to the Middle East.

"For a long time, he has been a regular worshipper at Mass with his family and in recent months he has been following a program of formation in progress for his reception into full communion," he said.

"My prayers are with him, his wife and family at this joyful moment in their journey of faith together," Vatican spokesperson Frederico Lombardi added. "Catholics are glad to welcome into their community someone who has followed a serious and reflective path towards Catholicism." The leader of the worldwide Anglican communion, Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, also wished Blair well.

Blair's conversion from Anglicanism had been expected for a long time.

He regularly attended Catholic Mass alongside his wife Cherie, a lifelong Catholic, while prime minister and only attended Anglican services on state occasions.

One of his last acts as premier was to visit Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican, fuelling speculation that a switch was imminent.

But converting earlier could have been tricky because of his role in peace talks between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, his government's legislation on same-sex partnerships and his role appointing Church of England bishops.

His former press chief, Alastair Campbell—who once told journalists "we don't do God" when Blair was asked about religion—told BBC television: "His faith does matter an awful lot to him as people who've worked with him, those who have known him, they've known that for some time.

"And it's something that I suspect he probably felt he couldn't do as prime minister, he's done it now." There is no legal or constitutional bar to a Catholic being British prime minister although there has never been a Catholic premier.

Some commentators suggest that Blair will struggle to reconcile his Catholic faith with certain political decisions taken by his government such as allowing same-sex couples to enter into legally recognized civil partnerships. AFP

CIA obstructed 9/11 investigators, says report

WASHINGTON—THE CIA OBstructed an official US commission investigating the Sept. 11 attacks by withholding tapes of interrogations of al Qaida operatives, according to a report published Saturday quoted in report on Saturday.

A review of documents by former members of the 9/11 commission revealed the panel made repeated, detailed requests for videotapes in 2003, 2004 and 2006 for information about the interrogations of members of the extremist network but were never notified of the tapes, the New York Times reported.

The review of the commission's correspondence with the Central Intelligence Agency came after the agency earlier this month revealed it had destroyed videotapes in 2005 that showed harsh interrogations of two al Qaeda members.

The review, written up in a memo prepared by Philip Zelikow, the former executive director of the 9/11 commission, said that "further investigation is needed" to resolve whether the CIA's failure to hand over the tapes violated federal law.

The memorandum does not assert that withholding the tapes was illegal but states that federal law penalizes anyone who "knowingly and willfully" withholds or "conceals or by a material fact" from a federal inquiry, the newspaper said.

The revelation adds to pressure on President George W. Bush's administration, already under fire over the affair by human rights groups and lawmakers who allege it has tried to cover up proof of torture.

The CIA responded that the panel never specifically asked for interrogation videos.

CIA spokesperson Mark Mansfield told AFP the agency had gone to "great lengths" to satisfy the panel's requests, and that commission members had been provided with details from interrogations of detainees.

"The 9/11 Commission certainly had access to, and drew from, detailed information that had been provided by terrorist detainees. That's how they reconstructed the plot in their comprehensive report," he said.

"Because it was thought the commission could ask about tapes at some point, they were not destroyed while the commission was active." AFP

Hoover wanted thousands arrested

WASHINGTON—FORMER FBI director J. Edgar Hoover proposed imprisoning 13,000 Americans in 1950 and suspending their right to habeas corpus because they were "potentially dangerous," the New York Times reported on Sunday.

Hoover, who ran the top law enforcement agency for decades, presented his plan to President Harry Truman 12 days after the start of the Korean War in a letter to a top White House national security aide, according to newly declassified documents cited by the Times.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation chief wrote that his agency would use a "custodial warrant" to "apprehend all individuals potentially dangerous" to national security based on an index of names compiled for years.

Hoover suggested Truman justify the mass jailings "to protect the country against treason, espionage and sabotage," said the declassified letter, which was posted on the newspaper's website.

There was no sign that Truman or his successor in the White House, Dwight Eisenhower, endorsed any aspect of Hoover's plan.

Since his death in 1972, historians have portrayed Hoover as having a mixed legacy, stubbornly violated civil liberties and overstated the threat of subversion.

He proposed his mass arrests in 1950 included suspending habeas corpus, or the right of detainees to challenge the legality of their imprisonment.

The principle, which dates back centuries, is enshrined in the US Constitution but has become the subject of debate in recent legal battles over the detention of suspects held as part of the US "war on terror." AFP

$4.17-B UN budget OKd but US objects

UNITED NATIONS—THE GEN eral Assembly early Saturday approved a twice-year UN budget of $4.17 billion but the United States said it how distressing was.

After marathon overnight talks, 140 members endorsed the recommendation of the assembly's budgetary committee to support 50% cheaf four $1-increase in regular for the 2008-2009 budget, up 6.5 percent from the previous one.

The United States voted against because it objected to a $6.7 million outlay in the budget to fund a follow-up to a 2001 world conference on racism and racial discrimination which it viewed as anti-Israel.

The US delegation withdrew from the 2001 conference on racism in Durban, South Africa, because it felt that the parley singled out Israel for criticism and "distortion" and suggested that apartheid existed in the Jewish state.

In recent days, US diplomats have also complained that the 35 percent increase in the administrative part of the budget was too high.

The United States is the world body's largest contributor, covering around 22 percent of the regular budget.

But welcomed the adoption of the budget by the assembly but expressed regret that "the methodology was not adopted by consensus, marking a break with traditions after 20 years." "The Secretary General urges all member states to refrain to consensus decision-making and to demonstrate a greater sense of flexibility and compromise, beyond individual national interests and in the common cause of multilateralism for the good of humankind," he press officer said in a statement. AFP

A SALVAGE barge lifts a specially designed basket containing the wreck of the 800-year-old merchant ship "Nanhai No. 1" from the waters off China's Guangdong province on Friday, Dec. 21.

800-year-old ship raised from China Sea

BEIJING—A MERCHANT ship loaded with porcelain and other antiquities that sank off China's south coast 800 years ago was raised from the bottom of the sea, state media reported on Saturday.

Archaeologists built a large steel basket around the 30-meter long 199-foot) boat ship, which was raised by a crane on Friday during a two-hour operation, Xinhua news agency reported.

Discovered in 1987 off the coast of Guangdong province, the ancient vessel is China's first No. 1 ship was recognized as one of the oldest and largest merchant boats sunk in China, the report said.

Archaeologists have recovered more than 4,000 containers made of gold, silver and porcelain as well as about 6,000 copper coins of the Song Dynasty (960-1279), said.

They estimated there were still 60,000 to 80,000 items on board.

The recovery of the boat is an important milestone for the study of porcelain in ancient China, archaeologists said. AFP

Risks of cholesterol drug not fully revealed

NEW EVIDENCE SHOWS THAT drugmakers Merck and Schering-Plough have conducted several studies of their popular cholesterol medicine Zetia that raise questions about its risks to the liver, but the companies have never published those results.

Partial results of the studies, alluded to in documents on the Food and Drug Administration's website, raise questions about whether Zetia can cause liver damage when used long-term with other cholesterol drugs called statins.

Most of the millions of people who use Zetia take it along with a statin like Lipitor, Crestor or Zocor. Or they take it in a single pill, Vytorin, that combines Zetia with Zocor.

The discovery of the unpublished research comes as Merck and Schering are already under criticism for not yet releasing data from an important Zetia study called Enhance, that they completed early last year.

The Enhance data may also contain important information about Zetia's liver risks. At least some patients were dropped from the Enhance study after testing revealed that they had elevated liver enzymes, a telltale sign. Though spokespersons confirmed this week.

But a full report on that trial, including the number of patients who had liver problems, will not be available until March.

Doctors say that by failing to disclose promptly all data research, Merck and Schering-Plough may be lowering the public with a misleadingly favorable view of Zetia's safety and benefits.

"You don't want to have data missing," said Dr. Steve Nissen, a professor of medicine and cardiology at the University of Washington. "When there have been adverse effects, when the benefits don't look impressive, those are the trials that I scientifically don't make it to press." AFP

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The WORLD

Edited by Lawrence B. Casco

Pro-Thaksin party claims victory in Thai elections

BANGKOK—ALLIES OF DEPOSED PREMIER Thaksin Shinawatra took a strong lead in Thailand's general elections on Sunday, according to exit polls, returning the self-made billionaire to the center of Thai politics.

THAKSIN

Vejjajiva said he would not dispute the PPP's right to form a coalition.

"So now we are in second place, and forming a coalition government is for the one that got the most," he told reporters, but later added they were still waiting for the official results.

PPP appeared to come out ahead in the polls, even though one-third of the country, including Thaksin's rural strongholds, are still under martial law.

Army-backed Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont insisted the polls were fair, and 1600 leader Samak Sundaravej said Sunday that he believed election authorities had dealt with the party even-handedly so far.

Thaksin has not returned to Thailand since the coup, living instead in self-imposed exile in Britain, where he bought the Manchester City football club.

The junta dissolved Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais) party and banned Thaksin political allies, but the man who made a fortune in telecoms has remained a dominant and divisive figure in Thai politics. AFP

The pro-Thaksin People Power Party (PPP) quickly announced that it would begin forming a coalition government, after exit polls showed it had a healthy lead over its nearest rival, the Democrat Party.

"It will definitely be a coalition government. We will discuss with the parties who have similar policy platforms to us," PPP's secretary general Surapong Suebsaeng told AFP.

The results were a repudiation of the military's relentless efforts to wipe out Thaksin's political influence, 15 months after the generals seized power in a bloodless coup, an analyst said.

"The results underlined that people still support Thaksin and want him to come back," said Chris Dubbsaeng, a professor of political science at Bangkok's Dhonburi Rajabhat University. "It also showed that Thaksin was still popular, especially among people living in northeastern provinces." The exit polls gave PPP at least 68 seats more than its nearest rival, the Democrat Party.

Election authorities planned to release unofficial results by midnight, but Democrat leader Abhisit Vejjajiva said he would not dispute the PPP's right to form a coalition.

"So now we are in second place, and forming a coalition government is for the one that got the most," he told reporters, but later added they were still waiting for the official results.

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Pakistan nabs blast suspects

PESHAWAR—REVERSE BUS-pools were arrested in the suicide bombing that killed 56 people in Pakistan but missed the target, a close ally of President Pervez Musharraf, security officials said on Saturday.

The announcement came as guilty new details emerged about the attack, which saw the bomber push his suicide vest with bullbearings to inflict as many casualties as possible.

Friday's bombing, one of the worst suicide attacks in Pakistan's troubled history, targeted Musharraf's former interior minister Aftab Sherpao, who led a government crackdown on Islamic militants.

"We have arrested several people," told one of the officials, who asked not to be named. "We have made important progress in the investigations and we hope to hunt down culprits."

The suicide attack was condemned by the United Nations and the United States, which counts Musharraf as a pivotal ally in its "war on terror" campaign against Islamic militancy.

The carnage has raised fears of more bloodshed in the run-up to the Jan. 8 parliamentary elections, which are already under intense international scrutiny after Musharraf's allies will try to rig the ballot.

Police said on Saturday they had found two suicide bombers' severed legs believed to be those of the suicide bomber and that they were conducting DNA tests. AFP

Leading candidates for Thai premier a study in contrast

SAMAK

ABHISIT

BANGKOK—EDE IS POLITE, Oxford-educated and moneyman handsome. The other is aging, acid-tongued and a veteran of tough and rumble politics.

One of them could be controlling Thailand's next prime minister after parliamentary elections on Sunday which will restore democracy after 15 months of military-led rule.

Samak Sundaravej, the 72-year-old veteran, is an ultra-right winger who heads the People's Power Party (formerly, almost from the hip-style in people after with some in the working class, though less so with academics and the media.

Samak is a populist, belligerent, pointing and divisive," says Thitinan Pongsudhirak, a political scientist at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. "He is not very appealing."

The opponent, Abhisit Vejjajiva, the 43-year-old head of the liberal Democrat Party, has artsy short hairstyles. Born and educated in England, in the bullhorned halls of Eton and Oxford, he is out of touch with regular people and downright boring, some experts say.

"He is well-equipped on paper but he has not been able to connect to the grass roots," Thitinan said. "He has not been able to widen and broaden his appeal to become a national candidate for prime minister."

Most polls show that Samak's People's Power Party will win the most seats but fall short of a majority in the 480-seat parliament.

Typically, the leader of the winning party forms a government with coalition partners and takes the premiership. However, some experts see another likely scenario: smaller parties joining forces with the Democrats, paving the way for Abhisit to take up the top post.

Samak is the torchbearer for Thaksin Shinawatra, the billionaire businessman who was ousted as prime minister in a bloodless coup in September 2006. He bears as well imposed stable to London, in part because he would face corruption charges if he returned.

The People's Power Party is made up mostly of Thaksin's old supporters, though Samak himself is known for Thaksin's image.

"I don't have to talk much about policies, because the whole country knows what the policies of our party are," Samak said in an interview with The Associated Press.

As prime minister from 2001 to 2006, Thaksin launched programs to help Thailand's poor, revel areas, including low-cost loans, virtually free medical care and village development projects.

"Thaksin did good things for the country, for five years and the whole country knows it," Samak said.

Samak, known as a car lover and passionate cook, carries some serious political baggage.

He is still remembered for allegedly ordering an right-wing mobs that killed leftist student activists in 1976. Now, he faces corruption charges related to the purchase of five trucks and bidding on a sewage project during his term as Bangkok mayor.

His opponent has been a shining star since he entered politics at the age of 37. AP

Scientists fine-tune tsunami warning system

BERLIN—AS THE THIRD ANniversary of the most tsunami nears, German scientists say they are working hard to boost a precious mode to their arsenal to prevent a repeat of the 2004 tragedy.

"The aim is to be able to send out an alert within 30 minutes of the earthquake that sets off the giant waves and to start them," said Jörn Lauterjung of Germany's national research center for geosciences (GFZ) in Potsdam seconds-frothy.

The effort to develop a complex quake measuring system with sensors on land and the ocean floor is being followed by satellite to connect computers, was made three weeks after the moment killed more 220,000 people along the Indian Ocean shoreline on Dec. 26, 2004.

The government of Indonesia, which bore the brunt of the killer waves, immediately accepted and 320 German experts were to work on a project named the German Gold-Standard in the Tsunami Early Warning System for the Indian Ocean (GITEWS).

Three years later, the mission is almost accomplished and the system is ready to begin the system up and running in November 2008.

Since early 2005, the German team has worked with Indonesian, American and Japanese (more on setting up 300 seismic monitoring stations and buoys anchoring 21 sensors to the ocean bed.

The seabed sensors are vital to the system's success because the instruments on land cannot give attention a picture of how the earth's plates have moved that below the surface to create a quake.

"The land sensors are not enough because they do not enable us to know how an earthquake has damaged the seabed. It is only if there is a vertical displacement that we will be followed by a tsunami," Lauterjung said.

In 2004, he explained, the strongest earthquake ever recorded in this region pushed the earth's crust upwards by 15 centimeters with a violent jolt that triggered the tsunami.

The underwater sensors are connected to buoys attached to navigate to make them sink more than 5 kilometers to the ocean floor.

They can measure the pressure of the water mass above them, and therefore its height. This means that any sudden variation in sea level is detected and used to predict the formation of giant waves.

The sensors carry out measurements every 15 seconds and relay the information to a buoy which sends the information to Jakarta via satellite.

If a quake is detected and at the same time the seabed movement measure abnormal wave pressure, another complex part of the warning system kicks in, as the GITEWS technology seeks to predict where and when the tsunami will strike the coast.

"These calculations unfortunately take a long time because, since the seabed is not even, the range of variables to be taken into account is vast. We have therefore developed models of potential trajectories to save our computers time," Lauterjung said.

The system had what has been described as a "baptism of fire" in September when an 8.4-magnitude earthquake struck off the west coast of Indonesia's Sumatra island. It measured the size and location of the quake within a record five minutes.

This enabled the scientists at Potsdam to raise the alert to Indonesian authorities more than 10 minutes earlier than the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Hawaii.

It is big experiment in a field where mere minutes can mean the difference between life and death for people in the path of a tsunami, the GFZ's Joachim Dietrich said.

It takes 30 to 50 minutes from the time a seabed earthquake happens for a tsunami to hit the coast. AFP

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SPORTS

Editor Rodolfo S. Mendoza Assistant Editor Francis T. J. Ochoa

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Cebu overwhelms Manila, puts away baseball crown

JOHN Bo Ubaga leads the throw to Manila Marlin catcher Ramel Reja and scores in a slide-on-plunge by the Cebu Dolphins in the sixth inning.

By Marc Anthony Reyes

CEBU BATTERED FIVE MANILA PITCHERS for 20 hits and turned the rubber match for the Baseball Philippines Series 2 championship into an unopposed 30-0 rout yesterday in the Rizal Memorial ball park.

The Dolphins, fourth players in the pro-tem series, opened an 18-1 lead on top of the sixth that should have ended the one-sided match, except that the 10-run mercy rule was not applied in the best-of-three title series.

"It's the ultimate shut out a," said Cebu team manager Isaac Bacaltos in the midst of his boys' celebration in the muddy outfield. "Labas ng dalagat ito, sa outcome, pati rounds. Everyone I put to touch a hit, even the sweetest."

Jonah Wood and Jerome Escobar drove in four runs each, Ruben Angeles won home runs and Migs Corrales had two RBIs while going four for four to lead the Dolphins' attack.

Southpaw Joseph Orillana, who won the opener for Cebu, 8-3, on a three-hit, six-relief-run win and the Series 2 MVP award, six-scattered 12 hits and struck out four a day after the Dolphins dropped a close 6-4 decision in Game 2 that extended the playoffs.

Manila starter ace pitcher Charlie Labrador, who pitched seven hits and five runs in the first two and 2/3 innings.

Ramon Jamito, the Game 2 winner, went one and lasted only one and 2/3 innings after giving up four hits, including a three-run single by Escobar.

Jon Cantu went to work on top of the fourth and surrendered four runs before Cebu went to town with a nine-hit, nine-run spree off Mike Marshall in the sixth inning for the 20-1 lead.

Even actor Richard Gomez, a Cebu third- refugee, added flair to the rout as he fetched a one-bat triple in that explosive sixth. (See related story on 4D.)

"I put in the pitchers but no one was able to stop their hitters," said Manila team manager Jolet Palanog, who even tapped retirees and Richard Gamboa to close the match.

The small crowd, which included topping 400 flyweight champ Nonito Donaire, stayed to cheer after Manila's Larry Ichan popped an easy fly for the third out then mercifully wrapped the carnage.

The Sharks unleashed a four-run uprising later in the inning but hardly made any difference.

As MVP for the season and the title-a-rama, Orillana received the Basilio "Sari" Fernandez trophy named after the late PBA commissioner.

Orillana, Labrador and four other members of Cebu and Manila joined Game 2 to join their teammates who received their cash incentives from President Macapagal-Arroyo the other day as other medalists in the senior baseball Asian Games behind Thailand.

The league, organized by Commissioner Sports Inc., will resume on March 29 next year with a second Bold-it-right season.

Line scores
CEBU
MANILA

Harbour Centre seals title duel with Hapee

By Jasmine N. Payo

HARBOUR CENTRE [PARTIES] HOT AND then roasted past San Sebastian, 79-67, to clinch the last PBL championship berth yesterday at the Rizal Memorial Coliseum.

With the La Salle duo of Ryu Hasebe and TY Tang dominating stats, Batang Pier arranged a best-of-three championship showdown with the unbeaten Hapee Toothpaste in the Turbowater Energy Drink Cup starting Thursday.

"Dad Rizal [another team] is back to be [there]," said coach Jorge Galent after Batang Pier prevailed in the Game 3 semifinal decider.

Galent said he hopes Batang Pier would overcome the inconsistency in their last few outings and end Harbour Centre's three-straight crown against a Hapee squad riding high on an 11-game winning streak.

"We have to practice our assistance de-

HARBOUR Centre big man Ryu Hasebe offers the rebound of San Mig Coffee's Jay Ilustre in yesterday's PBL rubber match at the Rizal Coliseum.

fense more," he said.

Coming from an all-around Game 2 performance, Hasebe let there took over in the nine series as Batang Pier were on to lead by as many as 27 points, 61-34, in the second half.

"We also started playing good defense in the second half," said Galent, adding the 6-foot-8 Hasebe had been down to just a handful.

Hasebe let powered his third straight semifinal double-double with 19 points and 12 rebounds, while Tang finished with 14.

Hapee claimed the first title ever after sweeping Tropang Rabbitcoast, 3-0, in their own semifinal encounter.

San Mig Coffee determined to end Harbour Centre's three-conference reign with an 80-72 victory in the series opener, before Batang Pier forged the Game 2 equalizer, 82-77, last Sunday.

Boobies Gonzales paced the Coffee Kings with 20 points, two assists in previous games, were Ian Sinda contains Pong Escobal and Ebenezer hastily made an import.

Batang Pier applied their superiority by dominating some of their first 11 games from beyond the arc in the third period for a 64-33 halftime.

The Coffee Kings, though, recovered from their neglect in the final quarter with a 12-2 run that trimmed the lead to 66-53, but a Gideon timeout quickly put things back in order for Batang Pier, who led, 79-58, heading into the final three minutes.

The scores
HARBOUR CENTRE (79)
SAN MIG COFFEE (67)

Futsal bronze shines like gold

By Jasmine N. Payo

ON THE GROWING SPORT OF FUTSAL, a branch of athletics recently turned garbage into, well, bronze. Literally.

Infact, the members of the Philippine women's futsal team will be the first to tell you that the bronze medal they admired each member's neck at the end of the 24th Southeast Asian Games in Thailand recently was dug from trash cans and piles of refuse.

So don't blame them if they see a golden shine in their medals.

"Futsal is a relatively new sport, so there wasn't any money for the team," said goalkeeper and co-captain Hillary Barangbang. "When the coaches told us there wasn't the any money we all decided that we could do it on our own."

To address the question of financing the team's participation in the biennial meet, in a spirit inherited on the issues specifically to boost Thailand's gold medal ambition, the team had a simple garage plan: sell newspapers, bottles, ink cartridges and old clothes.

"We collected them from our families, friends, colleagues and offices," said Barangbang. "We actually got stuff from garbage cans in stores and also at the University of Asia and the Pacific."

Team members also organized futsal clinics and tournaments and held raffles, solicitations, events and garage sales.

"It was a choice that we made after drinking beer and bowl of the sacrifices we needed to undertake in order to succeed," winger Carla Isabel Pamilar said.

No budget for the team

"One of those sacrifices was the money we needed in order to fund the participation fee for the SEA Games. The PSC (Philippine Sports Commission) is limited to what they can budget for our team. So we left no stone unturned in order to raise funds."

Amid it was scrutiny that newcomers have underwritten most futsal—an indoor version of football where each team fields in the players on court—it still garnered a coveted spot in the country.

"Sometimes you really have to prove yourself first before sponsors come in," said Manny Bamaghirad, team coach and Tiffany's husband.

"In fairness to the PSC, they didn't have any budget also," said Bamaghirad. "We've constantly seen spat and it's harder to gamble on us compared to betting stuff like other popular sports."

But with funds still short a week before the SEA Games, the couple decided to sell their car.

"We've been really planning to sell it," shared Bamaghirad. "Dito [where we are] in the Thailand, we sold it for P250,000 and we sold the car for P220,000. But we had to register it all."

Despite the off-court difficulties, the squad never lost its focus on the game.

"Our teams are resilience... sports, strength, hard work," said Bamaghirad. "This coaches did their homework, they did their strategies and plays. The team was spot enough to score things."

Understanding each other

The 14-member squad, composed mainly of former soccer players, is also relatively old—in sports years, at least—with an average age of 27.

"We're not the strongest, biggest and fastest, but we really worked hard," said Bamaghirad. "We understood each other and that really helped. We've been together for two and a half years. That's one of the things that gave us the edge."

In their tense, medal-match against

FROM GARBAGE TO GOLD: Members of the SP team pose for posterity at their recent thanksgiving party. Seated from left, Fern Mitch Limbo, Tiffany Bamaghirad, Gloria Arias, Sheila Mendoza, Francine Ruffy, Ria Tanjangco and Katrina Javier. (standing, same order) Kristin Fi SP coach Joel Villarino, coach Manny Bamaghirad, player Glenda Bacosa, Carla Pamilar and Bernadette Sanjay, assistant coach Paul Encarnacion and Legolo Schools PE director Alan Torres.

Malaysia, the Filipinos triumphed at 3-1 with Sheila Glenda delivering the goals in the ninth and 38th minutes and Mariam Ariel scoring in the 17th.

"Thanks to our Lord, because his plans were the best," said Bamaghirad. "We had our fights. But in the end of the day we played for one country, for the people who believed in us and for each other in the team."

Ginebra calling in Big J on Christmas Day?

THERE ARE TWO REASONS WHY the Philippine Basketball Association is coming up with a two-game package tomorrow, Christmas Day.

1) The PBA obviously feels the duty to celebrate, so it's throwing out a two-game party.

2) The PBA wants to join Mobiclicking in offering something special to millions of Filipinos overseas who are not here to spend Christmas with their loved ones.

Ah, no secret that the PBA, together with Mocave Pacquiao, has remained a top franchise among sports-loving Pinoys abroad.

And it's that glory for any expatriate longer is still tops on the list of our homesick countrymen.

So one sure bit of a gift for those heartbreaking hearts of the BP economy is to treat them to live PBA action at the Araneta Coliseum on Christmas Day.

* * *

So, the main gift, in this case, won't come in wrapped.

It's a rare thrilling around the PBA double-header, so there's no assurance call it a surprise package anymore.

The Dec. 25 schedule reads:

3 p.m.—Red Bull vs Alaska

5:30 p.m.—Ginebra vs Purefoods

Anyway, the countless basketball fans who have gone gaga over the Big J and Barangay Ginebra can just be glad to see that their favorite outfit, the defending conference titlist, has been blessing last and cold.

* * *

In fact, Ginebra, which had figured in unclutch-terrific fold-ups, squandering double-digit leads in at least three outings, lost its game last Friday and desperately.

Now, against league-leading Purefoods, the Kings will have to get out of their way, bag the Big Jo-led team that the lobbed moves say she spoke in the Christmas Day assistance to keep their solid-card character alive.

BARE EYE

Recah Trinidad

With their respective trademarks, the Red Bull-Alaska opening encounter on Christmas Day should pack all the spirits and thrills fit to put holidaymen and teams base to the edge of their seats.

* * *

Continuance an advice from the PBA media bureau:

"Purefoods, with its 11-1 slate, is assured of a slot in the semifinals. Red Bull, Alaska, Talk 'N Text, Sta. Lucia are lorely disputing the second semifinal seat. The Top Two teams gain automatic semifinal slots. The 3rd, 4th, 5th teams move on to the quarterfinals, while the 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th teams earn wildcard spots."

Tilth, that list, it can't be avoided that the PBA Christmas makes teamers the awesome league leader Purefoods against the defending conference titlist (Ginebra), who must steal out in order to avoid outright ouster.

* * *

Purefoods is sure to smile on Christmas Day but Ginebra, to expect, may need a holiday visit to its untruthful breath from no less than Bobby Jacobs, the Living Legend, in order to coin-original Bulong Barangay Ginebra herself to tomorrow's main event.

Both caution play for the Jun Magsaysay but, going by their confronting features and styles, there's no assuring if most products would prevail, over good old reliable Marlo Domingo.

No matter which way the Christmas mama game goes, the PBA shall have at its second timely winning points, mainly for the festive party goers around us.

With the holiday offering at the Big Dome, the PBA is certain to prevent the restless foul shooters among the NBA hopers from overstaying at the holiday table that, no doubt, lurks with the sweet poison of pork and other sins, not about holiday hangers.

Merry Christmas!

Happy holiday hangings to all!

* * *

(LURADAN: Sympathies to our dear friend Ellen "Bata" Reyes whose Kaya Reyes, a supreme gentleman like the world just examine himself passed away last Monday. Kindly pray for the eternal repose of Abdon Rasalio of Jacobo, Quezon, mother of actress Ilya Aquila and outstanding surgeon beauty at the University of Santo Tomas in the early 1960s, who passed her Creator last week and was interred in the Iskolar's Memorial Park in Paranaque. Salute and farewell to writer Adriano Ormeleo, 75, teacher and great admirer.)

Puentevella taps MVP as 'godfather'

By Jane Navarro

NEWLY APPOINTED 2008 BEIJING OLYMPICS CHIEF OF MISsion Rep. Monico Puentevella has tapped sports executive "godfather" for hosting and backwoods to boost the sports' chances of landing Our Philippines' first gold medal.

Puentevella, also the Philippine Olympic Committee 2nd vice president, got the commitment of PLDT Smart's dust Manny V. Pangilinan to support the campaign of the boxers and taekwondo divas in the Summer Games.

"My Pangilinan has agreed to help fund the training of these athletes," said Puentevella. "We will bring back the godfather system by asking for the commitment of other business bosses."

Taekwondo jins Tshenker Go and Mari Antoinette Rivero earned a private tip to the Olympics after finishing first in qualifier qualifying tournament while boxer Mary Tabarnar secured a Beijing stint at the world championships in Chicago in November.

"While the government has shown its all-out support to the campaign, the private sector will also be asked to come in as well," said Puentevella.

The weightlifting chief said he called congressional aid he would arrange a meeting between the boxers and President Mac upon her return as soon as he gets sponsorship pledges.

"When I present them to the President, it will just be a matter of (her) acceptance (of the godfather's bids)," said Puentevella.

Assuming has four Olympic qualifiers, led by freshman stance boxer quadruple-gold medalist Miguel Molina, Jk Vidal, Charly Coddity and Ryan Arabejo. Archery has also booked a ticket to the Games courtesy Mark Javier.

Top sports officials have earlier floated the issues of dropping small king Henry Ty of SEA Spokesman Zeldon Legaspi to make room for Dending Colantoque of Iron Digger Corp. as prospective bracketer of the country's Olympic drive.

"This is our most serious pursuit to win that elusive medal," said Puentevella. "And we will make sure that when we go (host Olympics), we're really prepared to get (it) this time."

POC president Jose "Peping" Cojuangco Jr. and PBC first William "Butch" Ramirez will spearhead the next group of officials who will study whether the preparation of the athletes.

Puentevella said some of the athletes will start heading to train overseas next month and that after the holidays, the monitoring group would meet at least once a week to see how the athletes are coming along the country's Olympic drive.

The President, Puentevella said, has thrown her all-out support to the campaign by directly involving herself in the fund-raising drive to augment the Olympian war chest of P50 million.

HOMEBOYS and officials of the NP-cycling team, led by top skier Irish Valenzuela, (right) (first left) and coach Jerard Lorenzo (left) flash the No. 1 sign.

Bike ace may race for Danish team

By Romeo S. Aurelio

FRESH FROM HIS CONQUEST OF THE TOUR of Thailand, the national cycling team received yet another honor after top rider Irish Valenzuela was invited to race for Denark continental team Bravo Dreamwell.

Coach Jerard Lorenzo said he has given his permission to Bravo Dreamwell's team manager to recruit Valenzuela to long as the Filipino remains available to serve the Philippine team.

"Why not? Lorenzo said over dish Sports Radio. "It would do the nationals a lot of good if they are tapped by foreign teams, especially the Europeans, because foreign exposure is what they need."

Lorenzo said that despite their lack of international experience, the national cyclists snatched four gold medals in the recent 2nd MD Cup race held in Cebu.

In the six-stage Thailand race that ended Friday, the 20-year-old Valenzuela placed second in the first stage and was the best-placed Filipino in fifth in the individual standings.

The NP team raised 71 hours, 40 minutes and seven seconds to beat Japan (72:04:40) and Thailand A (72:08:06) in the overall group event conditions and Asian championships.

Other members of the team in the 1,264-km race were Victor Espiritu, Marion Jurado, Lloyd Reynante and Ronald Gonzales.

Espiritu bested Abed of Iran emerged individual champion in a blistering of 28:42:48, Ariel Jurado De Ramos (Philippines) (4 seconds behind), Jesusdemus Abrazen of Iran (6 seconds behind) and Mahawang Pegah of Thailand (3:09 behind).

Standings after the final standings at the four-stage/three-day race: Victor Espiritu (Iran Racing) 28:42:48; Ariel Jurado De Ramos (Iran Racing) 28:42:48; Jesusdemus Abrazen (Iran Racing) 28:42:48; Mahawang Pegah (Thailand) 28:42:48; Ronald Gonzales (Philippines) 28:42:48; Lloyd Reynante (Philippines) 28:42:48; Marion Jurado (Philippines) 28:42:48; Victor Espiritu (Philippines) 28:42:48; Jerard Lorenzo (Philippines) 28:42:48; Irish Valenzuela (Philippines

Goma gets that winning feeling again

By Marc Reyes

DECEMBER COMES, the sports-loving scene becomes part of another winning many yesterday.

The towering seven-and-7N'clut utilized one more bullet to his sports cap when he did his share in the 20-5 rout that Cebu pulled off against Manila to their sudden reach for the Baseball Philippines Series I championship roster day at the Rizal Memorial ballpark.

Usually languishing in the dugout cheering on pennies, Gomez, a former second-stopper shows at midfielder, and thirdly found himself in the thick of things when the Dolphins started to rig the game open.

Tipped to pinch hit by Cebu team manager Jesse Barcelon, he tapped a grounder to senior no-fun-delight of a four Sunday crowd.

That burst of fielding obviously surprised the Manila outfielders who scrambled for the ball while Jerome Barcelon – who had earlier singled, then stole second – dashed for home.

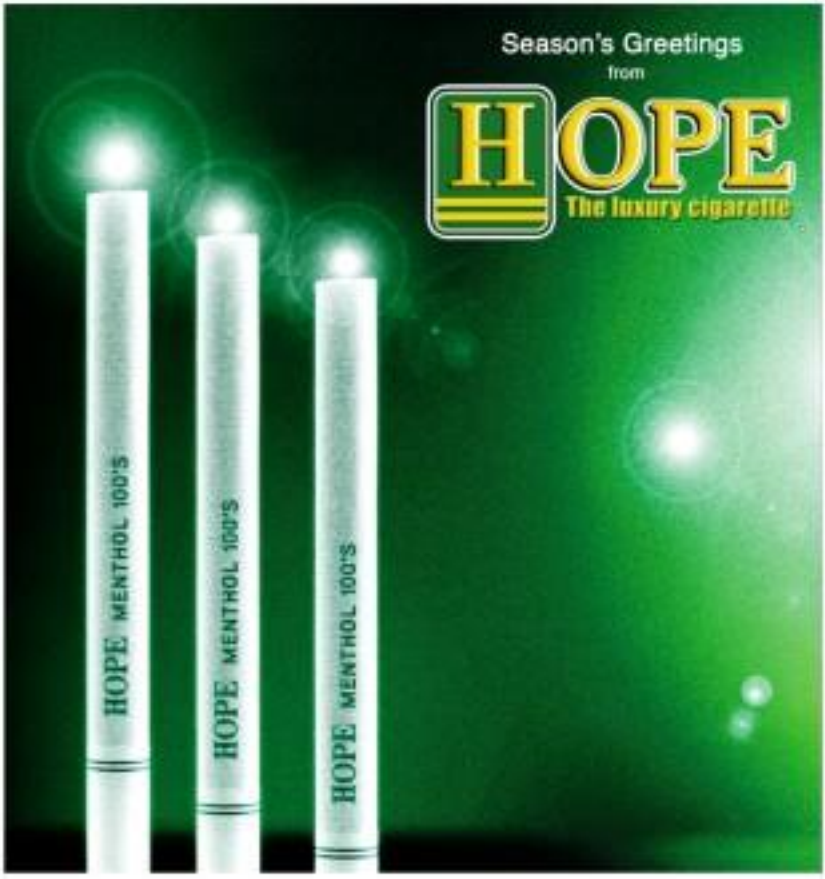
Gomez stroke one leisurely to first base, then sprinted all the way to third.

The run scoring triple was one of many hits Cebu pocketed in the sixth inning where the Dolphins piled up nine runs to take a huge 10-1 lead.

It also vindicated Gomez somehow from a home-to-one-retired relay earlier when he was nailed while trying to steal second in the eighth inning as pinch runner for Miggy Cuevas, Cebu trailing 8-0.

Until yesterday, Gomez's previous stature in the scoring zone was a one-run double in a no-hit-ing match against Marlboro.

Gomez, 41, who reportedly tried out for the national baseball team, started out as a pitcher before moving on to scouting, fencing and shooting.



Government Warning:
Cigarette smoking is dangerous to your health.

SPORTS

TRACT Michael Olaji of the Houston Rockets wrestles for control of the ball against Joe Smith of the Chicago Bulls.

Hot Yi steers Bucks past Bobcats

Yao injured as Rockets turn back struggling Bulls

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN—CHINESE rookie Yi Jianlian displayed an array of offensive weapons to score a career-high 29 points Saturday in the Milwaukee Bucks' 103-99 victory over the Charlotte Bobcats.

Yi, the sixth overall selection in the National Basketball Association draft last June, made his first 12 shots and finished 14-of-17 from the floor with 10 rebounds.

Yi scored 10 points in the third quarter as the Bucks built on their 58-47 halftime lead to take a 81-71 advantage after three quarters.

Charlotte cut the score to 97-99 on Raymond Felton's jumper with 4:44 left in the game, but Yi promptly answered with a jumper of his own seconds later.

"It's performance showed real improvement from his first effort against the Bobcats.

In that, his only game in NBA outing, Yi scored just two points on 1-of-6 shooting in a 102-99 loss at Charlotte.

Michael Redd added 27 points and Mo Williams had 22 as the Bucks improved to 8-8 at home.

Jason Richardson scored 30 and Emeka Okafor and Felton scored 17 apiece for Charlotte, who ended the season game.

The Bobcats had to battle just to get to the season in the face of winter storm wreaking havoc in Canada and in the Great Lakes and northeastern regions of the US.

Denver's big chunk Milwaukee's airport, keeping the Bobcats in Charlotte following their victory over the New York Knicks on Friday.

The team finally left Charlotte early Saturday and headed for Madison, Wisconsin.

Madison's airport was also closed, as the plane flew to Minneapolis—St. Paul International Airport for fuel.

The team then departed for Green Bay, about 160 miles south of Milwaukee, but that airport was closed while they were to the air.

The team eventually landed in Chicago's Midway Airport and took a bus to Milwaukee, arriving an hour before the game.

In San Antonio, Tim Duncan had 34 points and a season-high 18 rebounds, and the San Antonio Spurs beat the severely undermanned Los Angeles Clippers, 90-86.

Tony Parker had 28 points in his first game back since undergoing surgery to repair a left ankle. The Spurs snapped a two-game skid, while the Clippers' losing streak increased to four.

The game was never much in doubt, though the Clippers got within six points with less than two minutes to play.

In Phoenix, the Suns raced past the Toronto Raptors, 122-103, despite a career-high 42 points by the Raptors' Chris Bosh.

Leandro Barbosa, starting in place of injured Raja Bell, scored 31 points as Phoenix swept the season series from Toronto for the fourth consecutive season. The Suns are 6-0 against the Raptors since 2004.

In Indianapolis, Danny Granger scored 31 of his 35 points in the fourth quarter, and Indiana held off short-handed Washington, 93-91.

In Miami, Dwyane Wade hit a 20-foot jumper at the buzzer, giving the Heat a 104-102 victory over the Utah Jazz.

Wade finished with 23 points for Miami, which scored a 76-point second-half lead—but were when the 2006 NBA finals MVP jumped, shot and saw the ball bounce off the rim and through the hoop as time expired.

In East Rutherford, New Jersey, Richard Jefferson scored 31 points, Jason Kidd collected his 94th career triple-double and the Nets stopped the Golden State Warriors, 108-95.

Vince Carter finished with 23 points, including a clutch three pointer with 24.6 seconds left, for the Nets, who led by 14 in the first half and traveled some clutch plays from their Big Three to get the win.

Kidd finished with 15 points, 12 assists and 11 rebounds.

In Chicago, Tracy McGrady returned to the Houston lineup and had 20 points and eight assists as Yao Rockets past the Bulls, 116-98.

Yao Ming had 30 points and eight rebounds but sprained his right thumb in the third quarter.

In Memphis, Tennessee, Andre Iguodala made a 20-foot jumper as time expired to give the Philadelphia 76ers a 99-97 victory over the Grizzlies.

In New Orleans, Chris Paul had 19 points, 11 assists and five steals in only 30 minutes, helping the Hornets crush downtrodden Minnesota, 110-86.

AFP, AP

PHENOMENON Rookie Chinese rookie Yi Jianlian slam dunks after a fastbreak, one of his many offensive moves in a career night.

Escaño-Ignacio tops Chair's Cup

TERRY ESCAÑO AND PARTNER ALECIA Ignacio registered their familiarity of the course to score a combined net 138 under par 63 and win the second championship of the season ending 2007 Chairman's Cup at the Sherwood Hills Golf Club in Trece Martires, Cavite.

Escaño, a member of Sherwood Hills' sports and games committee, and Ignacio actually finished tied with three other pairs but they clinched the crown due to a lower handicap segment.

"This is my first with Alex [Ignacio] and hopefully we'll get more trophies in future Sherwood tournaments," said Escaño, who skippered the Manila Southwoods team during the Fil-Am Golf early this month.

Entrants Kim Hyung-soo and Park Hyun-ho recorded a three-under par 69 to capture low gross honors in the Jack Nicklaus-designed course.

The one-day event was sponsored by Goforex Inc., Wilson Sports, Club Leisure, Custom Clubmakers, Nomura, Sports Specialist, APAC, GFI Geo Co., GFI Golf Club, Federal Makegroup, Interocean Sportswear, Isuzu Phils., Kolt Inc., and Manila Southwoods Alumni.

TWOSOME Escaño (right) and partner Alex Ignacio (left) receive their trophies from Sherwood chair Robert Bahnsenin.

Foes find it tough to pierce through his 'D'

BOSTON—PAUL PIERCE M. wears used to hostile reboots way suggested that dodging wasn't his forte. Or, perhaps, if it was suggested, in a jest, of course, that it wasn't part of his repertoire.

That's no longer is the case.

Two coaches who passed through Boston University of offered unsolicited tributes to Pierce for his defense.

"I think Paul Pierce is guarding as well as I've ever seen him," said Bucks coach Larry Brydenbaugh. And Detroit's Flip Saunders said, "I've never seen Paul play defense the way he's played in the last two or three weeks. He's always been a guy who gets steals, but he's never been a guy who, turn on, will really go after you."

Bulls coaches also said the

PIERCE

same thing when asked for an explanation (in the arrival of Kevin Garnett).

"Terrie makes it contagious," Saunders said.

Celtics coach Doc Rivers doesn't care how it happened or why it happened, but he definitely does agree with them.

"Defensively and Saunders that it did, indeed, happen. "It's been unbelievable," Rivers said of some thing when asked for an explanation (in the arrival of Kevin Garnett).

"Terrie makes it contagious," Saunders said.

Celtics coach Doc Rivers doesn't care how it happened or why it happened, but he definitely does agree with them.

"Defensively and Saunders that it did, indeed, happen. "It's been unbelievable," Rivers said of Pierce's defense. "His focus has climbed to such a high level. Before, it, at times, seemed, you had to say 'Hey, Paul,' a few times, but he now understands that that is how we are going to win.

"Paul knows he's a good offensive player. But [Allen] knows he's a good offensive player. Kevin has always known that you have to be a defender all the time." *AFP, Times Service*

Flirting with undefeated season, Patriots battle woeful Dolphins

FOXBOROUGH—THE PATRIOTS are playing for history today at Gillette Stadium. The Miami Dolphins are playing to preserve it.

With homefield advantage throughout the AFC playoffs wrapped up, the Patriots' crusade to the NFL record books and quest for an undefeated season are the only compelling story lines remaining in the final two regular-season games.

New England (13-0) could set several NFL feats and individual records with its last two games, the Patriots would surpass the 1998 Minnesota Vikings (15-1) for the most points in a season; with four touchdowns, they would surpass the NFL mark for a season, 70, set by the 1984 Dolphins; and if someone new like everyone believes they will, wide receiver Randy Moss needs four TD receptions to erase Jerry Rice's standard for a season (22).

"Whatever the numbers are, they are so they aren't, but the most important number is 16 wins and hopefully we are make it 17," said Patriots coach Bill Belichick. "I think that's the number that we're all looking at, is the win-loss column."

Indeed, the most cherished mark the Patriots are chasing is the 1972 Dolphins' perfect season—17-0 overall, 14-0 in the regular season. Although the latest-day Dolphins, who started the season 9-11, are a far cry from their 1972 counterparts, it would be an early Christmas gift to South Florida if they ruined the Patriots' moment of perfection.

"Understanding what type of season they've had, you know what their intentions are and what they want to do," said cornerback Eric Wright. "Let's not kid ourselves."

"There's a lot of history here and we know we're a part of that history," said Miami quarterback Cleo Lemon. "We want to uphold that history. If we can go out and get a win for the '72 team, that would be great."

The 1-13 Dolphins, who scored their first victory of the season last Sunday, have given the Patriots fits in recent years, including a 38-24 New England win Oct. 21. *NYT News Service*

READY How touchdowns are up

IN THIS ISSUE

■ **No Free Lunch:** Hits and misses /B2
■ **Philex raises stake** in Pitkin to 10.8% /B5

BUSINESS
Letty Ricel D. Manalo ● Assistant Editor Cherrie S. Mariano

Peso seen stabilizing at 41 to $1

Bear Stearns sees end to BSP rate cuts

By Doris C. Dumlao

AMERICAN INVESTMENT BANKING GIANT BEAR Stearns sees the peso firming up at 41 against the dollar in the next 12 months while projecting the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas to end its cycle of interest-rate reduction.

"Our top currency picks for 2007 were the Indian rupee and the Philippine peso. Their returns can use top picks for 2008 but we also add the Chinese renminbi and Malaysian ringgit," Bear Stearns said in a commentary dated Dec. 19.

The bank noted that the leading performers this year was clearly the peso, followed closely by the Thai baht and eventually when monetary restrictions on the baht slowed down the latter's appreciation.

Bear Stearns added the Chinese renminbi as well as the Malaysian ringgit to its list of outperforming currencies for 2008.

"We believe that all four currencies will benefit from a combination of rising or already high interest rates as well as continued large capital inflows," it said.

In the month ahead, the bank predicted the peso stabilizing at 41.80 and only slightly gaining to 41.60 in the next six months before ranging to 41 in 12 months.

Bear Stearns said the rise in Philippine inflation last week to a 13-month high of 3.2 percent suggested that the case of interest-rate easing in the country had "come and gone."

It also observed that the Philippines was feeling its hottest inflation rate range of 4 percent

/B2/C1

Gov't borrowings down 30% in 11 months

By Michelle F. Remo

THE NATIONAL GOVERNment's borrowings from January to November posted a double-digit decline from a year ago as the rise in revenues, boosted by the sale of state-owned assets, reduced the need for loans.

Documents from the Bureau of the Treasury showed that the government incurred P418.58 billion in new loans in the first 11 months of the year, or lower by 30 percent from the P592.29 billion in borrowings in the same period last year.

These borrowed from local sources accounted for P305.86 billion, which was lower by 12.5 percent than the P347.37 billion a year ago. Domestic borrowings were done largely through the sale of treasury bills and bonds.

Foreign borrowings accounted for P112.99 billion of the total borrowings as of November.

/C4

Hits and misses

NO FREE LUNCH
Cielito F. Habito

NOW THAT THE YEAR 2007 IS drawing to a close, it's interesting to look at the economic assumptions, projections and forecasts made last year, and compare them to how the economy actually fared. I had written recently ("On fearless forecasts," BPL 11-12-07) that some of the key assumptions behind the economic projections made last year—the 2007 economic performance—particularly crude oil price and the exchange rate—turned out to be way off. It should be no surprise, then, that actual economic performance has been different from what was forecast. What is astonishing, however, is that the actual performance deviated from the projections in the opposite direction from what would be implied by some of the key underlying assumptions.

Bangko-GDP

I refer here to the way that real GDP growth, averaging 7.1 percent so far, has been better than what government projected (6.1-6.7 percent). One would have expected slower growth from the easy crude oil prices and the stronger peso (which was what was assumed last year ($61-64 a barrel)—values that have been reversed, big time). One would have also expected slower growth from the way the exchange rate has been much more than what had been assumed (P46-48 to the dollar).

On the latter point, actual export growth did end up much slower (around 3.0 percent so far) than what was projected (11 percent). It follows that growth arising from domestic spending must have been even more rapid than was anticipated last year, thereby compensating for the export shortfall. There were two clear drivers of this unexpectedly high domestic demand. One, faster than expected growth in overseas remittances propelled consumer spending even faster than it has already been growing, as the remittances ended up generating not just consumption growth but, more significantly, both investment and consumption spending, both for consumption and capital outlays (i.e., infrastructure), but also been much faster than expected.

Investment spending by private businesses, which is the remaining item in domestic spending, has been more of a drag than a driver in the past two years. So the surprise can't be coming from that.

More misses

We were also off on the government forecast for import growth, which was expected to rise by 10 percent, but had averaged only a 6.6-percent growth so far (especially when we factor in that we've been negative in earlier months). The current account—the difference between current foreign inflows and outflows from trade, tourism, and remittances—has also been in surplus by nearly four ($2.7 billion) that what was expected ($4 billion). The folks in charge were the surge in overseas remittances has not been enough to make up for the shortfall in expected export earnings.

Still another deviation from what was expected is the way the Bangko Sentral (BSP) has accommodated great investment reserves (now higher 1834.4 billion, or 5.6 months' worth of imports). The BSP has obviously been buying up those dollars than it had expected it to, mostly motivated by the desire to resist the too-rapid appreciation of the peso. As a result of this, it has been incurring huge accounting losses running into the tens of billions of pesos, as the dollars it buys keep going down in peso value.

Biggest miss

But the biggest item missed by the government, and the one of greatest economic significance, is the tax revenue figure. The originally projected total revenues for 2007 had been P1.19 trillion, broken down as P1.03 trillion in tax revenues, and P160.6 billion in non-tax revenues.

As of October, total tax revenues for the year had been P750 billion, or less than three-fourths (75 percent) of the full-year target, when the shuffle (10 percent) of the year had elapsed. On the other hand, non-tax revenues were running at P139.6 billion, or 154 percent of target for the full year. Total revenues as of October were thus running at P890 billion, or 80 percent of full year target, which is still slightly below what it should have been by then.

Fortunately for the government, it is managing to make up for a projected P30-billion shortfall in tax revenues with an almost equivalent amount in unanticipated privatization earnings. But as the credit ratings agencies, investment analysts and multilateral financial institutions keep pointing out, government cannot keep relying on these non-recurring revenues, and must simply shape up on tax collection efficiency.

Keeping the hits

Notwithstanding all these misses, it would seem that the "hits"—above "heavy shuffle"—in the three variables I keep saying matter the most: price, jobs and income. Inflation (2.7 percent) is well within the 2.6-3.1 percent projected range; unemployment is down to 6.5 percent from 7.3 percent last year; and income (GDP growth) at 7.1 percent so far) is better than the targeted 6.1-6.7 percent. All this is good (fortunate) news indeed.

But precisely because of the risks as discussed above, finding the good years last will be the real challenge in 2008. A blessed and Merry Christmas to one and all!

Comments are welcome at chabito@amosc.edu

Rockwell Land eyes new residential project

By Elizabeth Sanchez-Lacson

ROCKWELL LAND CORP IS LOOKing to fund new property projects with proceeds from a proposed initial public offer, an official of the Lopez Group said.

First Philippine Holdings Corp. president Elpidio Ibañez said Rockwell has acquired five hectares of a former General Milling Corp. plant along C5 in Pasig City that would be developed into a possible residential project. Details, however, were not yet available.

First Holdings owns a substantial stake in Rockwell Land.

Ibañez said the project could be funded by Rockwell Land's possible initial public offer. "There's no target size yet for the offer. It would depend on how the market is," he said.

Rockwell is also embarking on a joint venture project with state firm and majority shareholder Manila Electric Co. (Meralco) on an office development covering 10 hectares, primarily commercial. Ibañez, Meralco is the owner of the land within the Ortigas complex in Pasig City on which Rockwell will develop the BPO space.

Rockwell Land was earlier considering an initial public offer by the first quarter of 2006.

Rockwell Land is the developer of "Rockwell Center" in Makati, a prime 11-hectare, self-contained community. This was the site of a former power plant named after James Dugoune Rockwell, the first president of so-called Lopez-controlled firm, Manila Electric Co. (Meralco).

The Rockwell Center comprises several high-rise residential condominium projects, a sports and leisure club, a lifestyle shopping center known as the Power Plaza mall, the corporate headquarters of Meralco and Philcoa and the Ateneo Graduate School.

Rockwell Land was established in 1980 by the Lopez Group. Ortigas is currently 51 percent, and First Philippine Holdings Corp. and Benpres with 24.3 percent each.

Another Rockwell Land project is "One Rockwell," the only high-rise residential condominium with a J-shaped curve. One Rockwell was launched in 2005 and over 50 percent sold last year.

In 2006, Rockwell Land fully sold the "Joya Towers & Lofts," a condominium project that was touted as the first to launch the "loft concept," or units with high ceilings, to the local market.

More than 40 percent of sales of the Joya project came from the overseas Filipino market. Joya units will be delivered to home buyers in 2008.

Gov't borrowings down 30%

From page B1

This was 54.2 percent lower than last year's P249.82 billion. Foreign borrowings this year included the $1 billion guaranteed from the floation of sovereign bonds in January and those that come in the form of official development assistance.

Foreign liabilities have a smaller share in the government's borrowing program as finance officials wanted to limit the country's exposure to foreign exchange risks.

Officials said the drop in the borrowings reflected an improved fiscal condition of the government. It was reported earlier that the government posted a budget surplus of P12.6 billion during the first 11 months, aided by proceeds from privatization. That raised the possibility that the government could balance its budget by the end of the year, ahead of the original target of 2009.

Under the 2007 fiscal program, the government only intended to limit its budget deficit to P63 billion from last year's P96.8 billion. Finance officials said, however, that the surplus as of November is enough for full-year target would definitely be overperformed.

Peso ...

From page B1

while predicting that the country—along with Malaysia, Indonesia and South Korea—would hold their own while star-crossed economies were still nursing inflationary pressure.

On the fiscal side, Bear Stearns offered a mixed view on Asia's emerging markets. It noted that South Korea was running a small budget surplus while the Philippines, Indonesia and China were running small deficits.

"The Philippines may end up reporting a budget surplus for 2007 as a whole, owning a large volume of asset sales as a revenue item," Bear Stearns said.

"Asset sales, however, should not be considered as sources of finance and on this basis, the Philippines will still be recording small deficits this year and next," it said.

The national government incurred a budget surplus of P56.1 billion in November, boosting its chances of balancing the 2007 budget for the first time in a decade.

A record P90.6 billion was raised from the privatization program in the first 11 months of the year, resulting in a budget surplus of P12.6 billion for the period.

Maybank

December 21, 2007

Country	Unit	Cash Equivalent	Dollar Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	1.0000	1.0000	46.1000
Japan	Yen	120.0000	1.0000	0.3842
United Kingdom	Pound	0.5000	0.2500	92.2000
Hong Kong	Dollar	7.8000	1.0000	5.9103
Switzerland	Franc	1.2000	0.6000	38.4167
Canada	Dollar	0.9900	0.4950	46.5758
Singapore	Dollar	1.5000	0.7500	30.7333
Australia	Dollar	1.0400	0.5200	44.3173
Malaysia	Ringgit	3.4500	1.7250	13.3565
South Korea	Won	1000.0000	500.0000	0.0461
Taiwan	Dollar	33.0000	16.5000	1.3964
Indonesia	Rupiah	9000.0000	4500.0000	0.0051
Thailand	Baht	34.0000	17.0000	1.3547
UAE	Dirham	3.6700	1.8350	25.1362
EU	Euro	0.7000	0.3500	65.7857
Kuwait	Dinar	0.2900	0.1450	317.9310
Saudi	Riyal	3.7500	1.8750	24.5867
China	Yuan	7.3000	3.6500	6.3123
Vietnam	Dong	16000.0000	8000.0000	0.0029
Brunei	Dollar	1.5000	0.7500	30.7333
Philippines	Peso	46.1000	23.0500	1.0000

Mandaue City Reclamation now attracting more investment projects

By Irene S. Sino Cruz
Inquirer Visayas

CEBU CITY—MORE than 10 years after it was completed, the Mandaue City Reclamation Area has finally attracted investments, including the mall project of a Cebu-based company.

Mall venture

Carlos Go, chairman of Cebu-based Global Properties of Cebu Owning Hardware Group, said his firm would invest between P500 million and P600 million in Parkmall, its first venture into mall operations.

Go said it took almost a year to complete the design as they would like it to reflect the Cebuano lifestyle.

Christopher Tan, director for National business development, said the firm decided to invest into mall operations as it saw bright prospects in Cebu's economy and who would avail.

He said that to a recent a meeting, representatives of the country's major hypermarts had expressed confidence in Cebu's prospects.

In fact, Tan said, Sine Mart, one of the biggest supermarket chains, would locate in Parkmall.

Confidence

"We believe that the market of Cebu is growing. It still has untapped market potential," said Eric Do, Supercenter Inc. operations manager for Visayas and Mindanao.

She said the Sine Mart would unveil its new logo, concept and layout at the Parkmall branch, which would be the biggest outside Metro Manila.

He said there were 12 projects about to break ground in Mandaue Reclamation. He said the influx of investments showed confidence in Cebu.

He said the first phase of Parkmall, which includes Sine Mart and the office condo, would be completed by February next year while the main mall, which includes the Garden Parkmall, would be fully operational by June 2008.

The Parkmall is located at a site leased to the Mandaue City Reclamation Area but the mall itself will have a floor area of about 50,000 square meters.

New ventures

The other projects in the 300-hectare reclamation area are the Cebu Boardwalk Mall, the 21-floor Notarte's Suite and the Bohol-based Business Center, a nine-floor building that would offer office and retail spaces.

The Notarte Suite is a project of the owners of Notarte Lighting Waters, a proposed business hotel with over 1,000 rooms.

The Bohol-based Business Center project would target information technology (IT) business.

The Mandaue Reclamation Area was a project of Mandaue City government and developer EE Cruz Construction. The reclamation project was completed in 1993.

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—Angelo R. Puyat & Tito F. Hermosa of CI Magazine

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Crowd-pleasing laptop wins hearts and minds

Text and photos by Charles E. Bukay

IF YOU NOW FIND YOUR laptop to be too heavy, too slow and, perhaps, that it's up for replacement, then why not head to a Sony store and check the Vaio SZ Premium model?

While a number of customers may find Sony's laptops a bit too pricey, perhaps this time, buyers will find the Vaio SZ Premium (the VGN-SZ58GN/C model was the one lent to this writer) to be well worth its P149,990 price tag.

First of all, the Vaio SZ Premium is encased in a multi-layered carbon fiber housing, which is even lighter and stronger than the magnesium alloy shell most laptops in the market use.

No wonder this Vaio model only weighs less than 2 kilos, making it convenient to carry around.

Size thin

Vaio SZ Premium's 13.3-inch wide liquid crystal display (with a 16:9/Wide XGA of 1,280 x 800 pixel resolution) LED screen is razor thin and yet, according to Sony, it is resistant to shocks and cracks (this writer didn't see the need to test this claim).

What is also commendable is the laptop's Clear Bright LED screen, which is able to display images as bright as that on an LCD TV.

Sony attributes this to the use of the 4G backlights, dual inverters, an reflective glare filter and anti-reflection coating (this means black is blacker, displaying images that are more vivid). It also has a higher contrast, and reflection is minimal.

THE BUILT-IN camera is great for remote conferencing

THE SONY Vaio SZ Premium has two toggle switches just above the keyboard—one for "speed" and another for "stamina"

Apart from the fact that this laptop could rub on your "portable cinema", the Vaio SZ Premium sports a built-in 1.3-megapixel webcam and an integrated microphone (both to shoot the display), Bluetooth technology wireless LAN and built-in modem, which is most helpful if you are going to conduct remote meetings or keeping in touch with family and friends from anywhere in the world.

Impressively large

The VGN-SZ Premium's keys are impressively large and nice to type on, thanks to the wide 13.3-inch screen.

The spacious aluminum surface relieve your wrists and is also recommendable especially during long periods of laptop use, which is a rare quality for such a lightweight laptop.

Though the touch pad and mouse buttons incorporated the fingerprint scanner, they are comfortable to work with.

There is also F1 and F2 buttons and performance selector switch located above the keyboard, inside the hinge.

The A buttons give you easy, instant shortcuts, while the performance selector enables seamless selection of universal or internal graphics accelerator.

The Vaio SZ Premium also offers various connectivity options, mostly located on side panels (the USB 2.0 connectors are located together on the right side for increased accessibility).

WITH two of our cabinet yet energy-sapping features, the Vaio SZ Premium is powered by a long-life battery

Brainy, too

Of course, beauty is nothing without brains, so Sony equipped the Vaio SZ Premium with an Intel Core 2 Duo (last clocks 2.40 Gigahertz, a 2 GB memory, a 160 Gigabyte (Hybrid) hard drive, as well as a unique Hybrid Graphic System that offers a choice of external NVIDIA GeForce 8400M GS GPU or internal graphics accelerator. (This means you may switch to Speed mode if you're playing 3D games, video or editing, or to Stamina mode if you are just doing various mobile tasks.)

The Vaio SZ Premium that this writer got is powered by a Windows Vista Business.

But despite these energy-sapping features, the Vaio SZ Premium still last longer than most of its competition, considering that its 10.8 volt, 5,800 mAh, lithium-ion battery (VGP-BPS30) could last up to seven hours. (There is also an optional longer life battery, the VGP-BPS9 variant, that lasts up to 9.3 hours).

Indeed, with all these features, the Vaio SZ Premium should appeal to consumers who chase performance and reliability over cost.

Rizal beats Pacquiao for place beside Angel, Avril

By Rio T. Dichoso

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, NATIONAL hero Jose Rizal is "googled" more often than Manny Pacquiao in Google.com.ph.

According to search engine giant Google, our National Hero has beaten The People's Champion in the category of "personality search."

The most Googled personalities this year were "angel locsin," "avril lavigne," and "jose rizal."

Following the trio are "katrina halili," "manny pacquiao," "britney spears," "vanessa hudgens," "paris hilton," "akon," and "kim chiu."

Still on personalities, the top local female actress searches are "angel locsin," "katrina halili," "kim chiu," "diana zubiri," "angelica panganiban," "marian rivera," "ethan salvador" and "maja salvador."

In sports-related searches, basketball and boxing still rule Filipinos' hearts and minds.

The term "nba" was the most searched, followed by "pba (Philippine Basketball Association)," "mcland (official website of Manny Pacquiao)," "www 1World Wrestling Entertainment)," "manny pacquiao," "uaap (University Athletic Association of the Philippines)," "boxing," "mba," "mpa," and "ufc."

In the "music related" category, the top searches are "lyrics," "lyrics," "rates," "avril lavigne," "electric guitar," "lyrics," "my chemical romance," "britney spears," "mp3," and "high school musical."

When it comes to gadgets, the locally unavailable iPhone has captured the public's imagination. The term "iphone" was typed in the "tools gadgets related" category, followed by "psp (Playstation Portable)," "ipod."

Nokia sounded out the top five with "nokia 6300," and "nokia n95."

Google regularly publishes the "Google Zeitgeist," which is calculated by looking at the aggregation of the most popular and fast rising search queries being typed into the Google.com.ph search box. Zeitgeist means "spirit of the times."

"Because millions of people use Google to search for what's new and interesting, their queries, when entered in volume, tend to be a good reflection of what's everyone's mind," Google said in a statement.

Changing the way today's businesses communicate

THE PHRASE "UNIFIED COMMUnication" may mean nothing to most Filipinos today.

But this will soon change as one company brings to the country next-generation technologies that will link voice, e-mail, instant messaging and mobility.

The idea behind unified communications is that today's modes of communications—e-mail, instant messaging, telephony and multimedia conferencing—should work in a way that is seamless, flexible and efficient for individuals to reach their colleagues, partners and customers with the devices and applications they use the most.

"Our company's technologies are designed to help eliminate today's barriers to efficiency, speed and performance by simplifying networks and connecting people in the information they need, when they need it," explained Armando Pascual, Avaya Philippines country manager.

Avaya is a recognized leader in delivering communications capabilities with powerful solutions spanning packet, optical, wireless and voice technologies.

Client's own pace

Pascual added that these convergence solutions can be tailored to fit a client company's pace—by adopting a revolutionary or evolutionary approach to best meet its needs.

"Indeed, our technologies will change the way businesses operate here in the Philippines as they will be able to shorten their decision time, increase their productivity and be able to provide a simple and consistent user experience across all types of communication.

"Pascual's combined experience in wired and wireless networks and in serving both enterprises and service providers gives us an edge over other vendors. We offer the most complete portfolio of unified communications solutions so our clients will only need to go to us," he said.

Partnered with Microsoft

Recently, the company teamed up with software, services and solutions leader Microsoft Corp. to jointly develop unified communications solutions and applications built around Microsoft's new Office Communications Server 2007 and Office Communicator 2007.

Noted will deliver solutions including enterprise voice, event applications, mission-critical telephony functions, advanced mobility capabilities and data networking infrastructure.

The software-centric approach, according to Pascual, will provide the easiest transition path for businesses, helping them to reduce the total cost of ownership, boosting employee productivity, enhancing customer relationships, or extending the value of existing systems.

As the alliance enters its second year, the companies promise to continue their joint research and development across enterprise, carrier and mobile product lines and are poised to ship a variety of new and updated products in the coming months.

—Charles E. Bukay

Philex raises stake in Pitkin to 10.8%

Additional 6.4% of Texas-based exploration firm acquired

By Aris R. Ilano

LISTED FIRM PHILEX MINING CORP. (MO-NAD) it had subscribed to an additional six million shares of Pitkin Petroleum Ltd. for $3 million, on behalf of its wholly owned subsidiary Philex Petroleum Corp.

In a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange, Philex said the acquisition of an additional 6.4 percent stake in Pitkin was in line with its thrust to increase its portfolio in petroleum.

This brought the Philex group's stake in Pitkin to 10.8 percent. Earlier, Philex subscribed to four million shares in Pitkin for $2 million, representing a 4.4 percent equity stake in the company.

The additional 6.4 percent Pitkin stake alone accounted for 36 percent of the Philex group's contribution to oil projects.

Pitkin is a Texas-based junior exploration company in the United States, currently producing on a small scale basis in Louisiana.

However, according to the disclosure, Pitkin has properties in offshore Vietnam and Peru.

The drilling in Vietnam, where Pitkin holds a 40-percent stake, is reportedly scheduled to begin in 2009. This involves two wells, with cost around $33 million.

Philex has interests in three other petroleum projects in Matinloc, Malampaya and South Sole sea areas.

Its other energy-related investment is in its wholly owned subsidiary, Philex Energy and Mining Corp., which is currently undertaking prefeasibility and development activities in a coal property in Zamboanga.

Philex Mining is a member of the consortium holding service contract 41 covering the deepwaters of South Cebu Sea.

It has a 2.204-percent interest in SC 41, up to the completion of the 3-D seismic survey which was estimated to cost more than $6 million.

Philex likewise holds a 3.40-percent stake in SC-6 (Galoc Block in Northwest Palawan) and 1.668 percent in SC-6A (Sirius Block in Northwest Palawan).

The Galoc field is estimated to produce between 1 to 2 million barrels of oil.

Philex also owns Coal Operating Contract 150 in Sang-Ilyahan South Zamboanga, which has an estimated coal resource of 21 million metric tons.

Coal quality ranges from bituminous to semi-anthracite which is expected to command price premium with the prevailing market conditions, the firm said.

Philex is seeking approval from the Department of Energy to convert COC 150 and start mine development works in the area.

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PFI-AC Philex Bond Fund | 1.3284 | 1.3326
PFI-AC Global Bond Fund | 1.2323 | 1.2370
PFI-AC Peso Bond Income Fund | 1.3681 | 1.3670
PFI-AC Peso Equity Fund | 1.2986 | 1.2981
PFI-AC Balanced Fund | 0.9781 | 0.9806

NEW PEZA FIRM

Isetex Philippines Technology Inc. (IPTI) president Teoh Khong Jin receives the Certificate of Registration from Philippine Economic Zone Authority (Peza) Director General Lilia B. de Lima for the company's registration as an economic export enterprise. Isetex is engaged in the design, fabrication and repair of printed circuit boards (PCBs) at the Laguna Technopark Special Economic Zone. Looking on is Stanley Teoh, IPTI factory manager.

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IPVG eyes stake in contact center

By Ross T. Dichoso Jr.

IPVG CORP. (IPVG) IS BACK ON THE SHOPping trail for a contact center after being rejected by Peoplesupport.

The listed information and communications technology firm said it was buying a majority stake in a 120-seat contact center company called Interactive Teleservices Corp. (Iteltech) for a still undisclosed amount.

IPVG said in a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange that it had executed a memorandum of agreement with the stockholders of Iteltech. "For the acquisition of a 70 percent stake in the company, subject to the approval of IPVG's board of directors."

IPVG said it wanted to close the deal in the first quarter of 2008, after completing its financial and legal due diligence.

Iteltech, which is ranked among the top 20 global BPO companies, operates 11 call centers with total capacity of 1,400 seats in the United States, Panama and the Philippines.

The contact center provides multi-lingual customer-care, business processes solutions covering solely to Fortune 500 companies in the Financial and Services sectors. Iteltech manages manned resources of about 645 million.

Peoplesupport, On Monday listed contact center that spurned IPVG, has an 6,000-seat operation in the Philippines offering customer care, inbound sales, technical support and direct response sales services. It is expecting its full-year revenue for 2007 to be between $140-$146 million and $141.4 million.

IPVG has yet to give a formal reaction on Peoplesupport's decision, saying it will make a statement on the matter soon.

Transco sells more sub-transmission assets

By Abigail L. Ho

NATIONAL TRANSMISSION CORP. HAS sold P128.92 million worth of sub-transmission assets to Zambales I Electric Cooperative (Zameco I), Batangas I Electric Cooperative (Batelec I) and Antipas Del Norte Electric Cooperative (Anteneo).

The Zameco I contract is worth P55.7 million, the Batelec I deal, P46.9 million and the Anteneo lease-purchase agreement, P26.3 million.

Under its agreement with Transco, Zameco I will purchase 323 circuit-km and 69 kilovolt (kV) line along the Olongapo-Philson, Philson-Tap Castillejos and Botolan-Castillejos 69-kV segment from San Felipe to Castillejos. These span a total of 98.6-circuit kilometers.

Batelec I is buying 647 structures along the Calaca-Taal and Calaca-Batangas-Calatagan 69-kV lines covering 61.6-circuit kilometers. The electric cooperative is purchasing the substation equipment in Taal as well.

For its part, Anteneo has signed a memorandum to purchase 72 structures along the Sual-Agno Interconnection 69-kV line spanning 11.5-circuit kilometers.

All three electric cooperatives can take advantage of Transco's financing program, which allows technically and financially qualified power distributors to pay only 20 percent of the selling price upon the Energy Regulatory Commission's approval of the lease purchase agreement.

The balance can then be amortized over a number of years. In Zameco 2's case, the payment period spans 17 years. The installment period for Batelec 1 and Anteneo is 15 years and 20 years, respectively.

Transco executives in North Luzon, South Luzon and Mindanao are the ones who stand to benefit greatly from the privatization of the sub-transmission assets. By purchasing and committing to operate and maintain these assets, these electric cooperatives have assured customers of improved operations and expansion projects under their franchise areas," Transco president Arthur Aguilar said.

"Transco, on the other hand, will be able to focus more on improving the reliability and efficiency of the nationwide high-voltage transmission network," he added.

Transco has so far sold 931.5 billion worth of sub-transmission assets to technically and financially qualified distribution utilities and electric cooperatives nationwide.

The buyers included 41 electric cooperatives and distribution utilities absorbing 328 megavolt-ampere (MVA) transformers, 16,347 structures, and 1,991 circuit kilometers of lines.

All sub-transmission divestment contracts become effective only upon the approval of the ERC.

SA 9166, or the Electric Power Industry Reform Act of 2001 (Epira), requires Transco to sell off its sub-transmission assets to qualified power distributors.

Transco has a total of P8.8 billion worth of sub-transmission assets nationwide, which includes 6,900 circuit kilometers of mostly 69 kV lines and 1,880 MVA of substation capacity.

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Thin ...

From page B1

income growth expectations for the fourth quarter this year against a backdrop of low inflation and interest rates, and expectations of strong revenue flights southern container terminals till the new year.

All Capital Securities said stocks could drift sideways due to the lack of negative leads.

"Traders will ride on positive momentum as renewed stimulus spending will support the market," Capital Securities said.

Campos Lanuza & Co. also said that the market could be lacking in catalysts until just days before the trading year.

The broker advised investors to buy stocks that remained undervalued and those that stand to benefit from the government's move to sell power assets.

The main market will be closed on Dec. 24 and 25, Elizabeth Sanchez-Lacson

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BUSINESS Monday

Power women in business talk about 2007 and 2008

By Maryjo Quimpo Espino

Trinity
(SM Group) Retail, banking, property development

Given our 7-percent growth rate for this year, and the positive economic environment in the fourth quarter, we aim to become ready to achieve our profit growth target of between 12 and 15 percent for 2007. For the first 9 months of this year, our profits grew by 14 percent to P6.5 billion, including extraordinary items, recurring income increased by 22 percent to P6.2 billion.

TESSIE SY-COSON

Projects undertaken

On the retail merchandising business, we opened five stores, of which two are department stores, two are hypermarkets and one supermarket, for the multi-use regional three-store store in Bacolod, Tarlac and Mandaluyong. Also, we expanded San Fernando, Pampanga, Cebu, and Mall of Asia, the latter with the opening of the Science Discovery Center. All told, our floor space increased by 119 percent.

For the banks, SBC got into the distribution with Equitable PCI Bank, while China Bank acquired Manila Banking Corp.

For property, our group got very busy with launching three new residential projects with Lindenwood Residences, Berkeley and Zone.

The commercial development completed and launched SM Convention Center and will soon open our BPO building Gmall.com Center. We also successfully launched our corporate project, in Honolulu called Piccolo Hotel, which is a 100-room P1.8-billion worth of condo-units. And finally, for hotels, we are now expanding Taal Vista Hotel and refurbishing Cebu Seafest which will be a five-star hotel by the time it's finished in late 2008.

Expectations for 2008

We are confident that the Philippine economy has sufficient momentum to cope with the external challenges facing it such as the weakness in the US and European markets and higher inflation due to the continuing increase in crude oil prices. On the soon, we decided to pursue our expansion plans across all our core businesses. Both our retail and mall businesses will be expanding nationwide of Metro Manila, while the banks will complete their consolidation of recent acquisitions. The property group will launch new residential projects, and perhaps break ground for new sports arenas and the Radisson hotel which will both be at the Mall of Asia complex. We will continue to roll condo units and launch our country club throughout Pico de Loro. All these will cost the whole group about P20 billion in capital expenditures.

VICKI LAUREOLA

Bro. Vicki Belo
(Belo Medical Group) Beauty business

2007 was a turning point for the Belo Medical Group. We experienced better than industry growth into despite uncontrollable factors in the external front... the shrinking of the US dollar in the last quarter of 2007, political issues bombing the economy out of new competitors.

2007 gave BMG the opportunity to evaluate its internal strengths and areas on its core solutions and reward business capital. BMG invested heavily on training personnel established world class standards, invest in information technology, made inroads in operational efficiencies, trained and empowered managers, invest in new marketing methods, and opened new multi-brand branches in Boracay and Tagaytay.

It also ventured in eight to ten ground markets in this leveraging the power of the Belo brand. BMG is consistently looking for new growth areas, in this to establish an unrivaled presence.

2008 and beyond

Belo Medical Group is enthusiastic as it look in its growth plans for 2008, formally our growth plans for 2008 and 2009 strategic progress meeting in 2007 up to 2011. The game plan is to collaborate BMG and prepare the organization to embrace exponential growth in the global medical tourism market.

Medical tourism initiatives and medical tourism organizations have identified the Philippines as a major destination for healthcare and wellness and BMG is lining up for a double-digit transaction on the medical and wellness tourism.

I, BMG will continue to invest our time in people (doctors and nonmedical personnel) to be world-class service providers. Its biggest asset would be its skilled doctors.

Last but not least, BMG is opening branches and establishes them in growth areas within and outside Metro Manila.

I, invest in research and development and create a culture of innovation in all service clients.

Ayah Regan-Haro
(Thirdlife 360) Educational organization, business process outsourcing

My main businesses are educational institutions (universities, pre-school and basic education, nursery and tourism college, eight call center schools and a 239-seat call center in Davao and in Manila.

2007 was a good year for all our businesses. Our hospitality school has undergone major renovations, classrooms and working laboratories were all equipped with the most modern facilities in hospitality and culinary training.

We were able to open eight call center schools in partnership with the big call centers here in Manila alone in the major cities of the country.

I had just finished signing an educational cooperation agreement with TAFE (New South Wales South Western Sydney Institute to jointly offer the Certificate III in Hospitality in our hospitality school in Davao. This is the first time that a Philippine school will be accredited to use the Australian Certificate without having to Sydney. This will commence on June 2008.

We want to put up four more call center schools in the country, training schools in major cities in Mindanao and establish strategic partnerships with businesses here in Manila and overseas so that we can provide more employment opportunities to our graduates. Currently our employment rate is 65 percent. I am telling my people that we should hit 70-75 percent next year. We will be pulling out even more placement offices to focus on placement and employment of all our graduates. Our goal is to hire services to fill our graduates.

The 200-seat call center which we put up here in Manila last November is not yet operating...we now have an more manpower requirements and we are in where the small businesses (under 100 are in the United States to hire) to increase of 40 percent.

We were able to open three branches of call center schools in Mindanao because the demand for skilled call center agents from call centers were tremendous. We brought training and employment opportunities in partnership with the big call centers here in Manila down to

BUSINESS

Trade with Taiwan shrank 4% as of September

By Bernie W. Dominguez

MERCHANDISE TRADE WITH Taiwan remained on a downtrend as of end-September, with the value of exchanged goods down 4 percent at $6.3 billion even as economic officials pushed for closer ties.

According to the latest data from Taipei's Government Information Office, Taiwan bought from the Philippines $1.72 billion worth of goods from January to September.

The volume of imports from the Philippines dropped 28.09 percent from about $2.217 bil. posted in the same period of 2006.

At the same time, Taiwanese shipments to the Philippines were valued at $3.169 billion, increasing by 0.04 percent from $3.26 billion in the same period last year.

Further, the Taiwan GIO reported that the Philippines remained Taiwan's 15th largest trading partner in the nine-month period, accounting for 1.16 percent of the island country's total global trade valued at about $182 billion.

Among developing countries excluding mainland China, the Philippines was Taiwan's sixth-largest trade partner after Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam.

China is Taiwan's largest trading partner with an 18.9-percent share or $64.4 billion of the latter's aggregate trade in terms of value.

Also, the Philippines was the 11th largest destination of Taiwanese exports with 2 percent of total outbound cargoes valued at some $138.7 billion.

The country ranked 17th among the largest sources of Taiwan's imports, accounting for about 1.07 percent of total inbound shipments worth some $141.26 billion.

This was a notch higher than a month earlier, when the Philippines traded India in terms of the value of shipments to Taiwan.

The end-September ranking was also a notable improvement from the first quarter when the Philippines was ranked 20th.

In November, Taiwanese officials reiterated calls for more investment incentives to Taipei and Manila continue to work out the realization of a bilateral trade and economic accord.

Minister of Economic Affairs Steve Chen, who visited the country for the second joined economic council meeting, said Taiwanese investors were particularly hopeful to better business climate in the Subic and Clark freeport zones.

"Many Taiwanese firms are increasingly getting discouraged with the deteriorating investment conditions in China and are looking for alternative destinations," Chen had said.

He said examples under discussions were efforts to ensure sufficient supply of power and water at much more stable prices; ensure production cost could be maintained at a much lower level; and provide market potential for Taiwanese investors not only in the Philippines but also in the entire Southeast Asian region.

Gov't attracts offers to bring Travel Café to more countries

FOREIGN INTEREST IN THE DEPARTMENT of Tourism's pioneering global franchise chain of travel outlets is snowballing, prompting the Tourism Promotions Board to open branches in the Middle East, Russia, China, Canada and the United States.

Tourism Secretary Joseph Ace Durano said in an interview that some investors had expressed interest to open Travel Café Philippines in Australia, Moscow, Beijing, Los Angeles, Las Vegas and Vancouver.

Durano said that was developing as first franchise holder TravelBizCenter, a joint venture between Japan's Travel Café Co. Ltd. (TCCL) and Hakuei Skyliner Inc., last week opened the first of three prototype TCCIs at Ground Zero.

Described as a destination-themed lifestyle café and geared for the high-end market, TCP integrates the businesses of a restaurant and a travel and tourism office where customers can plan and arrange vacations.

TravelBizCentre is expected to open the others two branches at the SM Mall of Asia and SMX Convention Center in January.

The same franchisee is preparing two more branches in San Francisco, California while TCCL is investing alone in a TCP in Singapore—a follow up to the first TCP in Tokyo.

"As soon as we can confirm locations, we are ready to open TCPs in Seoul, South Korea and Shanghai in China," Durano said.

The official explained that prototype branches were needed to test the franchise operations systems and ensure that these were working and could be replicated.

Further, he said the prototypes must be to full business operations to serve as information and kit for potential franchisees.

In an interview last week, TCCL executive vice president Kazuyuki Goto said the prototype branch was considered a laboratory, from where lessons would be learned for this specialized café and where new issues for the menu would be developed.

Cited for the Ground Zero branch would be the headquarters for the worldwide TCP network.

He explained that the idea behind TCI, which he developed, was to entice potential tourists to the Philippines through the experiences available in the metro as well as the sights and sounds within the café.

The travelbiz 3-menu highlights over a dozen coffee, touted as the rarest and most expensive type of coffee in the world, as well as salad with edible flakes, fare bars, pain de sel, sorrel and sarmet.

Bernie W. Dominguez

DA steps up campaign vs bird flu

By Amy R. Remo

THE DEPARTMENT of Agriculture has intensified its campaign against bird flu as its monitoring unit reports that the dreaded avian influenza has again resurfaced in Asia, particularly Indonesia, Myanmar and Pakistan.

Agriculture Secretary Arthur C. Yap said he had ordered the Bureau of Animal Industry to step up implementation of preventive measures to airports and seaports, particularly in the cities of Davao and General Santos due to their proximities to Indonesia.

"I have also directed the BAI to remain vigilant in banning the entry of live birds and require surveillance operations on migratory birds, which are known carriers of the deadly H5N1 avian influenza virus," Yap said.

As of Dec. 18, the World Health Organization reported that the H5N1 strain of bird flu has infected 346 people with 209 fatalities since the virus first resurfaced in Asia in 2003.

Last Dec. 11, an Al-infected person died in the Bauren province of Indonesia.

There have also been recent reports of AI infections in Myanmar and Pakistan.

BAI director Dariano Cabagan said the AI laboratory in Pampanga continues to collect blood samples from birds to ensure that the Philippines' P164-billion poultry industry remains free from bird flu.

He said the BAI had also improved its control measures to monitor the movement of ducks, which can be carriers of the bird flu, and had ordered suppliers and growers to secure permits for their transfer movement.

The BAI, Cabagan added, carries out strict monitoring and control measures to prevent domestic poultry and ducks to come in contact with migratory birds from the 20 critical areas identified under the Avian Influenza Prevention Program.

The Philippines, Singapore and Brunei remain the only bird flu-free countries in Southeast Asia.

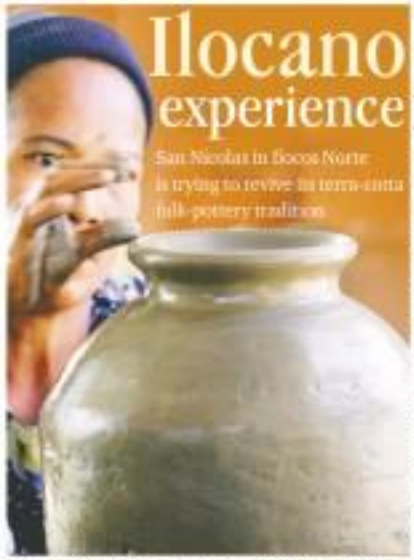
On top of building more avian flu diagnostic labs similar to the facility in Pampanga, the BAI has also encouraged poultry farmers to implement bio-security measures.

Cabagan said the importation of heeping Philippine poultry farms virus-free cannot be underestimated, considering the possible devastating impact of an avian influenza outbreak on the multi-billion peso Philippine poultry industry.

LIFESTYLE
Editor Chris Batol-Fortunes
Associate Editor Lira B. Zulueta

Ilocano experience earthen pots rebirth

San Nicolas in Ilocos Norte is trying to revive its terra-cotta folk-pottery tradition



IN PERFECT SHAPE. Martha Agonay, a longtime potter in San Nicolas, puts the finishing touches to her barung (jar).

By Cristina Arcayan
Inquirer Northern Luzon
Photos by Melvyn Calderon

SAN NICOLAS, ILOCOS Norte—The ancient art of terra-cotta pottery in this northern town has been given a facelift with the revival of the lowly banga (cooking pot), which has become an icon of Ilocano heritage and traditional occupation that dates back to the turn of the 19th century.

The Ilocos terra-cotta manufacturing had been largely dismissed as a vanishing industry until the community began seeing the historical value of pottery as an enduring monument to the hundreds craft that now symbolizes San Nicolas' heritage.

There could not have been a better way of preserving San Nicolas traditional industry than paying tribute to the ancient craft through the Gang ay ti Damdiaw, a pottery festival on the occasion of the town's feast later this month.

Mayor Alfredo Valdez, a largely credited for reviving the town's earnage industry through the festival as an innovative approach to keeping the craft alive.

Valdez, whose family was the 365 Plaza, the biggest commercial strip in San Nicolas, commissioned the town's potters to produce the bricks for the commercial complex.

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PRIDE OF PLACE
Auguste Villalon

'All is calm, all is bright'

From the ravages of the Indochinese war and the genocidal Pol Pot regime, Angkor Wat has been restored as a sanctuary of peace

WHEN MY COPY OF THE last edition of Tower and Country arrived, I started leafing through it from back to front, as I usually do.

But I never got past Monique Gil Jamet's full-page photograph of tall, frost-robed monks strolling on one of the long galleries of Angkor Wat on the issue's last page.

Manuel Chavez's caption, "All is calm, all is bright," summed up what Angkor is today and what, for me, Angkor has always been, a place of total peace.

I went into the Cambodian jungle to see Angkor in 1998 when I was an anthropology student, totally unprepared for the grandeur of temples crowning the onslaught of nature.

It was a place where giant trees violently asserted nature's power by insisting on growing over intensive stone constructions that for centuries subtly fought back. On forays into nature to survive.

The scene of timeless struggle of temples in the dense jungle was unforgettable.

Laced with intricate stone detailing, long walkways with exquisitely carved stone warriors and unsettling bas-relief on every single wall formed a network of corridors that led pilgrims quietly and meditatively away from the wide-open temple exterior toward the inner sanctum, a place where "all is calm, all is bright."

Angkor was quiet in 1998. I felt as if I was the only person there. There was a sense of peace I had never experienced before.

Return

When I returned 17 years later, I was one of thousands of pilgrim-taking tourists.

The memory I remembered so vividly had vanished. The little that remained was decaptioned, dismembered, and, in many instances, eyes were violently gouged out.

The temples were skeletons of what I remembered. Gone is the chair-corridors now bare. Architectural details, stone flowering and lion-relief were all brutally hacked away during what was a terrible period of war.

Corridors, now filled with casks of rainfresh popping tourists, no longer spoke with the serene silence of lost Angkor, or so I thought, until I saw in Monique's photograph evidence that the raven voices of turbulence weathered by Angkor during this stage of its life were over.

Although it is no longer the Angkor that I knew, from wrinkling a few recognize that the human experience the Cambodian people have survived had caused a search for a new, different place where "all is calm, all is bright."

This is the season for us to end turmoil and come back to our own place where all is calm, all is bright.

Tina wishes for a calm and bright Christmas.

feedback is welcome at pride.place@gmail.com

GOOD CATCH: Thailand painters' sam-nanta after a workshop with Magnet-based visual artists

THIRD GENERATION: Five-year-old Eugene Rangcapan stands young with pottery beside his late grandma-model, Nora Po-ot

Ilocano earthen . . .

From page 17

As he tends it a policy he owes construction project in his town is include bricks in the building's materials to help generate income for San Nicolas pottery.

Boxes churches

The oldest enduring symbol of town is still plastered across San Nicolas with the province of Ilocos churches built out of bricks during the latter part of the 19th century.

Oral history says the bricks that built these churches came from the Kilns of San Nicolas.

The Ilocos Norte Travel Guidebook, for instance, chronicled that four brick ovens were built in the town by the end of the Spanish era, giving rise to a belief that San Nicolas folk provided the bricks that were used in building most of the century Ilocos churches.

Brick manufacturing, to this day, is regarded as Ilocos Norte's thriving ancient industry. One of the most recent historical buildings San Nicolas' artisans take pride in is the posh five Ilocandia Resort Hotel in the seaside village of Calaoan in Laoag City.

President Ferdinand Marcos had the brick hotel built in 1965 to accommodate guests to time for the wedding of his youngest daughter Irene, to businessman Gregorio Araneta III.

First Lady Imelda Marcos supposedly commissioned an entire village of potters in San Nicolas to produce bricks for the 200-plus room hotel.

Amanecia Bernardo, then a high-school freshman, was among those who made the bricks used at the hotel. Now 60, Bernardo remains a potter in practically the biggest pottery industry in San Nicolas today.

Tribute

The Rangcapan siblings—Victoria, Josephina and Virgilio—set up the pottery business as a tribute to their mother, Dorotea, who taught them the craft of pot making.

Nora Po-ot started producing pots when she was barely 10 years old, having grown in a family of potters.

Now 70, Nora Po-ot, recognized as an outstanding San Nicolenos in 2006, is still doing what she does best: molding and shaping cooking pots.

Josephina said her mother starts the day early at the shop and would produce over 100 small cooking pots by the end of the day.

"Her domain is cooking pots. The younger ones do not have the patience to produce pots because it demands special care and tough labor, like nursing a baby," she said.

Located in the village of Barabat, the manufacturing area does not have any signage, which is typical to a cottage industry.

But motorists cruising along the San Nicolas-Burgos road in eastern Ilocos Norte could see nine there. Freshly baked red-coated earthenware line the road while hundreds of newly molded pots spill to the sugarcane fields around the more than 100-sq m lot.

Josephina's protect at least 10 potters from the searing Ilocos sun as they work using handmade molding wheels.

To the Rangcapan siblings, pottery had been just a means to feed their families, until their products got the attention of museum-goer Joseph Galvante, medical director at St. Luke's Medical Center in Quezon City.

Galvante, a native of Ilocos City, earns that Ilocos Norteños branch out where a heritage village sits. The resort has become a tourist magnet in Caribbean town.

It was Galvante who invited Pagsibat artist and sculptor Mark Valenzuela to provide a workshop for San Nicolas potters in their quest to improve some techniques in town-crest pottery. Gualvante, later commissioned Valenzuela to create town-

BUNNY, SAN NICOLAS-STYLE. This is an antique jar distinctly San Nicolas that uses bottle caps as ear rings.

cut to pieces that would be installed in his resort.

The two met through Ilocos Norte tourism officer Boni Grande during the "Dala ni Lapid" travelling terracotta exhibit at the Cultural Center of the Philippines in 2009.

Valenzuela, 37, a painter, has entered his mark in town-wide marking career but started using clay as a medium in 2004.

Those in the town-town business had branded him a "maverick artist" because of his memorable run as a sculptor. He has incurred a job exhibit in Metro Manila and is set to display his creations in Singapore next year.

Products

San Nicolas' pottery pieces, which range from cooking and flower pots, water jars, stoves, wall carvings, to roof tiles and bricks, are more functional than decorative, leaving Valenzuela, who worked with another sculptor, Sandy Cabrera, from Ingaoj Negrito Occidental, in providing new techniques for the potters during the workshops.

"I agreed to do the workshop with them because I was looking forward to an exchange of techniques," he said.

He said Ilocos clay was better than the type they used in Pangasinan. "It does not readily crack even when exposed to air or sunlight. In Dumaguete, we usage sea clay with plastic to keep the air, and we keep them from the sun," he said.

The workshop-pasalubong will be on display at the town hall during the Sinnoll festival on Dec. 28.

Potter Pablo Capat III, who studied pottery in Japan and California, was invited to open the exhibit with Valenzuela as curator.

JOINT WORKSHOP: San Nicolas Potter Alfredo Valdez (standing, right) with Magnet-based visual artists Mark Valenzuela and Sandy Cabrera (standing, left) and San Nicolas Pamilihan Association potters

Charlie C

By Constantino C. Tejero

CHARLIE CO AND ROMULDO Abrazado, two of the most prominent artists of Negros Occidental, are co-founders of a small socially committed group called Black Artists of Asia. Starting opening from the name and all what has long been known as a social volcano, they unusually gravitate toward Social Realism.

It is 10: of the edgier kind...the one more deeply swallowing in social evils, what is identified as the New Objectivists. This is an incendiary mix of expressionism and surrealism that almost always deals with provoking evil.

Shared thus in the same locale and sociopolitical background, Co and Abrazado create artworks that have related looks, or take a similar spirit, and are characterized by the same concern for social problems. Both display distinctive simply-angular figures, motifs from lower mythology and folk religion, and a vigorous coloration that mostly consists of primary and secondary colors of ten 'bordering on

This is all reminiscent of George Grosz, Raoul Appel and the Cobra, particularly in the childlike quality and intuitive humor of their hands brutal imagery and also the use of motifs from mythology and folklore. It is an art of reality and hues.

But while Abrazado is mystified more or less by his own and local issues, as much as the plight of the organizer-plantation workers, Co's appears to be more global in reach as he explores the evils wrought upon the common run by class and economics, politics and religion.

Consider Co's latest exhibit "Portraits of Chinamen," opens in oil on canvas, until Dec. 31 in Galleria Dominia, 230 Lacson St., Bacolod City.

A Chinese Filipino, the artist stayed in Sin-

"PIG Bones and Jackets"

JOSE Mc Cortin, Sonia Roa, Ina Joan Miguel Zobel, Toyet Pascual and Lucy Jimenez Magsaysay

ORET Herrera, former president of Metropolitan Museum; Francis Herrera and Toni Villaluz

PASUNG and Kenia Que

ARCHITECT Tonl Villaluz and Chit Quirimidor

IBM. Edgardo Rogero

A 'Pearl' of a book launch and exhibit

PILLARS OF ARTS AND CULTURE, business and government were present to celebrate the launch of "Pearl of the Orient: The Philippines in a Shell," a special book by José Maria Cuenco and Jessie F. Hitt on painting and carvings on mother-of-pearl shells.

The event at the Metropolitan Museum also launched an exhibit displaying carvings and paintings on mother-of-pearl shells.

The guests of honor at the book launch were legendary painter Imelda Magsaysay-Ho and arts patron Sen. Edgardo Angara.

Other guests were Sen. Juan Miguel Zubiri and National Artists F. Sionil Jose, Virgilio Almario and Salvador Bernal.

Also present were cultural personalities and Philippine art champions Basilio Bacani, Chi Severino, Paulino Que, and Dr. Toyet Pascual, as well as architect Augusto Villalon, author Robert Lim, and the founder and treasurer of the Fil. Ip Historical Society Foundation, Cora Balova.

Other champions of art and culture in attendance were painters Lieutner Uychiaoi, Alfie Herbosa, Diane Herbosa, artists Avanti Bista and Thaddeus Cecilio-Ia, the former president of the Metropolitan Museum, Oret Herrera, the president of the Cultural Center of the Philippines, Nestor Jacinto, and the former president of the French for the Cultural Countries of the Philippines, Olive Reynaldo Principe.

Also spotted in the launch were business titles in shell Lyn Antonio-Magsaysay, movie producer Digna Santiago with her daughter Myra, Mona Pecaborn's sister Fyona, and the Foundations for Lily Ed ucations on Heart Guevara' Chi Chi Lopezel.

Copies of "Pearl of the Orient" are available in the shops of Metropolitan Museum, Ayala Museum, Lopez Museum, Yuchengco Museum and the Filipiana meritage Library.

Co's incendiary realism

"DRAGONBOY on Cloud Nine"

"GLORIOUS China"

Redolent of Orientalia in motif and chromatics, it is so rich in imagery and tonality it could gloss over the message

jing early this year, and in this show he is seeing Chinese through the eyes of a Swiss Tiroler who would be pejorative if it weren't meant to be humorous.

Here are his signature cartoonish figures drawn with manikin wit and rendered in the calming color, deep hues of vivid red, brilliant blue, dandelion orange, solid black, yellow, brown, white and gray.

The spontaneous characters are depicted in border lore and chiefly Western clothing supposedly to identify the country as among the superpowers. Yet the artist continues the old social clichés.

In "Double Agent" and "Terror Agent," located in the complex frame and the paleo colors, we see the stereotype of the inscrutable Oriental, always a matter of eyes orange and double dealing.

In "Temptation on Guochina," it looks like a child subjects, for he has dominating the whole canvas in a plane of sickly yellow.

"Glorious China" is my favorite portrait of a "downsized Chinese: a decadent five-storey court, most probably symbolic of insidious capitalism that socialist ruin.

"Masters of World" and "Masters of Business Revisited" are a return to the artist's more scathing form. But they're still interesting, the former alluding to the country's poisonous taints and the latter to its consumerist greed.

"Bounce" is indicative of Orientalia in mood and characters, as well the imagery and tone. Its reality it could gloss over the sinister message.

"I try to record the political mess such as we, painting global political landscapes," says the artist, "but I have not ever crutched the outlaw."

Well say this is either skin deep a scathing—as in his previous shows, using the cityscapes as one as a neutral motif. Is had already shown he could be apocalyptic when less to face with evil.

uz at Serendra

[illegible] ARTIST ARTURO LUZ. H[illegible] of Galeria Raphael's exhibi[illegible] and Dec. 31.

he show highlights such series as [illegible]s," "Cities of the Past" and [illegible] Seasons," 1995-2005.

[illegible]ected in the show are several [illegible] paints such as Luz's 2004[illegible]'s "Cities of the Past" and 1992's [illegible]69 in "Pre-Columbia." Also in the [illegible]e are two Architecture series, [illegible]s, "Three Architectures" and "Two [illegible]ctures and a Juggler," both [illegible]ng 2004/06.

[illegible]efore Raphael is in Unit 2C-00, [illegible]. The Plaza, Serendra Mall, Bonifacio Global City. Tagaig, until ed. [illegible]hour 1968-8394. For more information visit www.galeriaraphael.com.

Arturo Luz, named National Artist for painting in 1997, went to the UST School of Fine Arts, then received a scholarship at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland for a three-year diploma in ceramics. He received his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 1960 and in Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris in 1961.

He is a three-time first-prize winner at the Arts Association of the Philippines Annual Competition, from 1956 to the 1960s. He was awarded the Order of Gloriosa Artes et Letters by the French government in 1970.

HK art auction raises funds for charity

NETWORKS DONATED BY FILIPINO artists under Galerie Joaquin helped raise some P1.4 million for the International Care Ministries (ICM), a Hong Kong-based charity helping indigent families in the Visayas and Mindanao.

In a bidding attended by over 600 guests in the black tie banquet at the Island Shangri-La Hotel in Hong Kong, a medium-sized mixed media painting titled "**Pagsamasama**" by Dominic Rubio was sold for HK$1,000 (P357,500).

A 48" x 72" mixed media by Carlo Magno, "Summer Solstice," fetched HK$1,800 (P357,500).

A major work by Dominic Rubio, "**Old Manila (Papisahang),**" raised HK$1,600 (P407,500).

The three artworks were included among the 35 items of the live auction portion of the fundraiser.

Smaller works were included in the silent auction. A Neil Campos 24" x 28" work generated $12,000. An abstract triptych by Karina Bahjatar brought in $9,000. A Bolido 24" x 20" work raised $8,000.

ICM's feeding program provides 35 needy families in each participating clinic with weekly food supplements of 4-kg packages of rice.

Every week, the local church partners up with ICM holds classes on basic health, character development (hospital, responsibility anger management) and religion.

ICM's medical program provides healthcare services for the poor.

ICM also runs a livelihood program for the poor.

"**PAGSAMASAMA,**" by Dominic Rubio

"**BALIKAK,**" by Jerwin Sario

"**SUMMER Solstice**" 48, by Carlo Magno

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BALLET Philippines' "Snow White," created by Ellie Nolan (EDNe Photo/ChoreoGraphic)

ALVIN Saenz is the perfect Pinocchio in the Ballet Manila production staged by Osias Barayuga.

"PINOCCHIO" is short and sweet, fast-paced and full of "happy crap."

Christmas ballets delight children

By Ellen Krystle Roquiros
Contributor

THIS DECEMBER, BALLET REPERTOIRES of two well-loved children's classics left the young in semi-mystified wonder, proving the timelessness of both production: Ballet Philippines' (BP) "Snow White" and Ballet Manila's "Pinocchio."

The famous brothers' fairytale was brought to life in a modern spin by Ellie Nolan, owner of Ellie Nolan ImaCentre (formerly Ellie Nolan School of Classical Ballet).

The steps and lifts are safe, but did not fail to showcase the dancers in the 19 dozen BP mounted in just two weeks on the Cultural Center of the Philippines Main Theater.

Carmen Adea glowed as dainty Snow White in the Disney-style blue-red-and-white dress. The 24-year old was wonderfully excited and effortlessly threw out her grand jetés. She seemed for a bit while whipping out pirouettes during the wedding scene, but was able to recover quickly.

The audience held their breath as Adea's romantic pas de deux with Angel Gabriel's Prince Charming, who held such towering felt director was a little unsteady in his solo determination.

Of the seven comical dwarfs who were natural favorites in heavy rubber masks, Marvel "Edema" Bautista's naughty Sleepy is the most delightful character that all of their comedic and splits, especially during their head-hopping number, elicited applause from the audience.

Hilarious, too, were Patrick Rebollido's obnoxious Queen and Rosebon Velasco's fleeting Huntsman, while the excited-to-be rouge de ballet (courtesy of dozen Coco's of birds, butterflies, dragonflies, bats, trees, mirrors and a snakeskin) knew did a fancy job of building the light-hearted atmosphere for its cause.

The Prince's friends, led by Ellen Ibardaloza (CCP dancer-choreographer) and Regg Georgen in white-and-gold tutus and livery, provided elegance (and stretched the wedding scene longer) to the show, last produced eight years ago.

Adding to the "snow effect" of the fantasy show in its hands swinging by Enmeverse Flores as was the dwarfs' house that split open to the middle, as well as the gigantic mirror that was actually a trees scenes which have a big hole in the curtain.

Ballet Philippines caps its 30th season with "Lasia Hora," March 14-16, 2008, at the CCP Little Theater.

'Pinocchio'

Now on its third staging, the much-applauded "Pinocchio," staged by Ballet Manila's artistic associate Osias Barayuga at the star Aliw Theater, elicited emotional squeals from children as young as 3 years old.

The ballet is short and sweet, fast-paced and full of "happy crap"—very much like Barayuga, who, in an interview, said he was influenced by choreographer Toni Sabella.

After much applause at curtain call, the audience now clamors for a lengthened version that could show off BM's premier dancers some more.

PATRICK Rebollido (in black) as the obnoxious Queen

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'After Aïda' and beyond

By Allan Pacurza
Contributor

LIGHTER FORMS OF theater usually receive a genial reception from the theater-going public.

Musical comedies, for example, have a ready thumbs-up-going for them, or even straight comedies for that matter, because as the feature nowadays attests the realm of the slapstick.

It's has to involve language, familiarity is a consideration; it is "serious" theater, earned emotion is key formula.

The performative and literary aspects of theater have been constantly problematized by critics, but I believe in drama critic Eric Bentley's argument that as long as there are good scenes, we'll still have theater.

This is not to imply that Jo-Ann Mitchell's "After Aïda" lacks literariness. But it would be outright preposterous to compare it to a Beckett or a Brecht.

"After Aïda" works on various levels, says the complicated thematics of easy categorization and the convenient labels we invoke in front of need. It may seem like any dressing-room play you have seen, and can be properly so, but it does not pretend to be otherwise.

The almost kitchen-sinkery inspections made through the appearances of excerpts from Verdi's opera as we be-musicians a novelty that to any opinion disrupt the melodrama.

Musicians' production of the play at the BDO Pasadena Santiago Hall was a triumph in many respects. One sure, the cast was powerhouses.

The nuances were rendered with nothing short of a well-intentioned "sincerities," which is beyond the limits and proportionalisms of melodrama—rightly so, a measure of subtleties.

Thus read, the play is naturally an attempt at anything but mere "mimetic." "After Aïda" then is literary in that sense, though never can literary for the stage. In some parts, it even exploits the possibilities of a theater of "ideas" rather than the consequences of human actions.

Riveting eloquence

It is surely noteworthy that the soliloquies were acted with eloquence, that even the actors' mere recitation drew strong emotions from a listener.

Eloquence can and would have to, refer to something more than diction. All the actors in the production have that—Brad Hollister as Verdi, Bart Guingona as Boito, Bobbie Guevara as Busetto, Steven Campos Alvarez as Ricciocchi, Julius del Mundo as Faccio's—though I am tempted to single out Alvarez's performance as Giuseppina Strepponi.

Alvarez is a thespian of the moment. It is rather difficult to go through Mitchell's predilection for the complex neuroticism (which pervades even his novels), so that it purports to resemble the complexity of traditional soliloquy within the space of the stage, and the play itself, as a shift in locality.

In truth, it is, as it appears, a separate new duet aside for its own unique d'être. Alvarez not only conquered this one hurdle; she also crossed it over.

The group of singers who performed emerges from external Verdi operas consisted of One of the most sought-after classical singers in the country today—Rachelle Gerseling, Naomi Espina, Shinah Freixe, Randy Ghingo and Noel Arcena.

Together with the exciting presence Mary Jessie Espina, they provided the additional orchestra to Mitchell's play, which may be considered meritorious.

Even Mitchell's preference for the bourgeois presentness of the conventional drawing-room play set is take off point to deploy an important reveal in Verdi's life's just to be despised, not to mention his being overtly British about it.

Musicians' production of "After Aïda" is timely. It only for its nature of championing the artist's creative process. However, its emotion-a statement is it about the value of Culture, it serves its purpose well within its capacity.

If we took the anti-materialistic stance of Matthew Arnold, we would have believed him when he wrote that culture was "the best that has been thought and said in the world." We take it to mean, for sure, the best—and more enough, the soul.

SCENES from the Musicians production of Jolan Mitchell's "After Aida"

Night of rhapsodic waltzes

By Antonia C. Hila
Contributor

PIANIST ILYA RASHKOVSKY once more electrified Manila's music-lovers with his engaging pianistic charm in a return engagement recently at the Philamlife Theatre.

The concert was sponsored by the Chopin Society of Hong Kong in cooperation with the Philippine Overseas Life Insurance Company.

The young pianist, only 23 year old, played an all-solo program of varying stylistic idioms culled from different composers. He definitely knew his native Slavic knowledge could not have been superbly entertained without adequate technical grounding, which he pitying unanimously revealed.

What intelligence and technical command we found, great music masters. Intuitive discernment and clean line playing are by characteristic earmarkings. They make listening so boring and uninspired.

The young Russian pianist has clearly shown a fine between-sentence playing and his own brilliant pianism.

The Chopin waltzes were a fine starting point. Conventionally romantic, they tugged at the listeners' hearts.

The pieces revealed the brilliant, dashing and positively expressive elements of Chopin's works, such as in the opening piece, Waltz in A-Flat Major, Op. 34, and the last number, Waltz in E Minor. The ensuing Scherzo piece, Valse, Op. 38 in A-Flat Major, showed much affinity for Chopin.

Rashkovsky's playing of Ravel's La Valse led to a change in mood. Rhapsodic romance gave way to jolting, fiery pyrotechnics that demanded utmost dexterity on her fingers.

Rashkovsky further explored Ravel's high sense of individuality, which although departed from the conventions of sonata to sentimentality in his Valses Nobles et Sentimentales, neatly packaged in eight connected entries.

It was in these Ravel works the pianist showed much poignant pianism, emphasizing the supreme beauty of line rather than power. The humility crisis which he wrapped his straightforward rendition of the previous Chopin pieces were rendered irrelevant by his playing of the Ravel pieces—the overawing moment of the evening.

The tunes were communicated by insinuation and the rhythm-drive stunningly flowing, making the rendition strikingly symphonic.

The pianist earned our most passages in Liszt's Soirée de Vienne: No.6 in A Major, he treated the unique themes with a singing quality. He capped his playing with the demanding "Mephisto" Waltz, tossing the notes once more in glorious heights.

Technical flourish was abundant, with chords that soared not only for full connection but also by exacting delicacy, enhancing nuances and the like. The middle section, which the pianist played with heavenly dispatch, added spark to his awesome playing.

Tenor Gary del Rosario in concert

The Foundation for the Musical Arts, Inc. is presenting tenor Leodigario "Gary" del Rosario in a homecoming concert at the Philamlife Theater on Feb. 1, 2008, with collaborative pianist Raul Tranico.

Del Rosario, a resident artist of the Seattle Opera Company, has enjoyed lead roles in several opera houses in the United States for critical acclaim.

He was last heard in Manila in 2000 as the featured soloist of the prestigious Toyota Classics, with the Cultuspex Symphony Orchestra conducted by Philip Ianniciello.

He will sing Western as well as Philippine art songs, and operatic arias from well-loved operas.

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Christmas ballets...

From page B1

Alvin Saroza is the perfect Pinocchio for this show. Flexible and armed with a ready smile, he seems very ripe for the demanding choreographic of jumps, splits and other contortions.

Sophia Garcia's Fairy and grown-colored Jiminy Cricket supported Saroza well, especially during the pantomime scenes, while Jonathan Antolin as Pinocchio's father, Geppetto, provided the hunt-searching moments. Marvin Tolentino's Stromboli, who looked like a pot-bellied Captain Jack Sparrow, got appreciative laughter.

Enero Gonzo is the elegant Blue Fairy (in white tutu, go figure) accompanied by equally graceful fairies who sent little girls in the audience dancing with anticipation.

Francis Carandang's masked Fox and Sarah Abigail Uno's Cat were the Funny Immortals, wiggling antagonists who lured Pinocchio away from school. But at times it was apparent they were concentrating more on the steps and a little less on expression.

The joy in children's faces was most apparent, however, during the underwater scene in black light (design by Jaime Villanueva) that made the dancers' fluorescent costumes glow.

Bright jellyfish and other sea creatures glided over from the sides of the theater mesmerized the audience. The giant whale of lemon yielded Hansel-ness specimen.

P&P's program also featured another well-applauded Barroso creation, the seamless "Sonata," his 8th choreographic work since a spinal operation a year ago.

The "ballerina's Prince" used a lot of big schapio movements in this very lyrical and almost ballet on love, molding phrases each twenty-seconds of the ensemble and pianist.

The stellar star is led by "ballerina of the people" Lisa Macuja-Elizalde and Rudy de Dios. They were equal in passion and emotion throughout the 45-minute performance.

And as De Dios gave Elizalde the shower kiss, the audience was silenced, waiting with bated breath on what was about to happen.

Two drumbeats and several couples effectively framed the musicians, clean and exact in a flurry of flowing steps. It seemed the audience was almost afraid to blink for fear of missing anything, most especially the final pose: six stars carrying the luminously revitalized lovers.

Barroso said that past year actually from a 1984 creation by deceased mentor and acclaimed choreographer Ado Cruz, during which Barroso was just a beginner in ballet.

The ballet "luxury" piece premiered during "Music, Text, Magic," a celebration of composer Edward Elgar's 150th birth anniversary at the CCP Main Theater in November, where the ballet had live accompaniment from foreign artists, violinist Robert Sullivan and pianist Olga Dudnik.

Ballet Manila will again perform "Pinocchio" on Dec. 25 and 31. It will stay for Carlo's season with "La Coralie" on Feb 15-24 at the Star Theater, CCP Complex.

CARISSA takes to a dainty Snow White in the Disney-style blue-red and-white dress

Specialty bookstore opens in Cebu, Ermita

POWERBOOKS CCEO closes nearly with the recent opening of its flagship branch in 2/L Northwing, SM City Cebu, the first specialty bookstore in the area.

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Party for Carmen Guerrero Nakpil's 'Legends & Adventures'

LORNA Kalaw-Tirol, Ali Moreno-Ocampo and Mish Pacanza

SEN. Jamby Madrigal and Sing Gonzales Montano

GM Nakpil and Gemma Brunnels

CESAR and Joy Virata

JAKI Hauzaret, Carmen Guerrero Nakpil, Manila Mayor Fredi Lim and Chito Madrigal Collantes

A YEAR AFTER PASE OF "MYRTLE ELEvehera," by Carmen Guerrero Nakpil, revealed the first volume of her autobiography, they will have their curiosity rewarded with the publication of its sequel, "Legends & Adventures," which covers the period between 1946 and 1983.

To launch the new volume, Chito Madrigal Collantes hosted a mouthfilling book party at her Scottish-clerked style residence.

Among those present were personalities from the hub era of journalism, politics and foreign relations captured in the book, including Joaquin Bocco Jr., son of Don Chino Locsin Lazard, Isabel Oreglon, Grant and Joy Virata, Mayor Fred Lim, Mark Higgins (son of Imelda's designer Salvacion Lim), David Eala (grandson of Jorge Valencia), Fe Gosio (daughter of Don Avellana), Janice Lobrig Lucas, David Guerrero (son of Lenie Guerrero), Manila Bunn Guerrero (daughter of Manila Times owner Ramon Bunn), Raul and Phin Bethanikon (widow of Chief Justice Roberto Concepcion, left).

Also present were writers Lorna K. Tirol, Sylvia Mayuga, Linda Pandilla, Eggie Apostol, Jake Macasaet, Amanda Sena, Chit and Virgil Samson.

"Legends & Adventures" retains the sharp observations, the flair for the setting of the earlier volume which dealt with the years of Imelda, the author's early years and the circumstance of World War II. In the new volume, she adds the dampened, scandal-ridden excitement of postwar Manila, rebuilt, feisty and independent, as the 'Iris City of the Far East, where the young war widow reinvented the hard cows and survived new pain.

"A new life is riskier than the old one, as any turn-the-station survivor will tell you," she writes of herself. "The surely rules of old threats are gone and the only etiquette is Eng-Yan Eng."

As an observer, ingenious journalist, she moves through several decades of "Legends" (the politicians, writers, artists and celebrities) and "Adventures" in newsrooms, courtrooms, palaces and hovels in New York, Tripoli, Florence, Beijing, Kazakhstan, Paris, always just a step ahead of all kinds of dangers. But she's also a working mother, a public servant and, first of all, a writer.

"Legends & Adventures" has more pages than its predecessor, 50 more photos, and a clever Andy Warhol-esque portrait on its cover which is a nod to the eight lives Nakpil has had since 1945.

Both "Legends & Adventures" and "Myself, Elsewhere" (winner of the National Book Award 2005, Manila Critics Circle) are available at National Book Store (Newsbooks and Fully Booked. Call Nakpil Publishing, 417 9565 or 0921 4011 480.

ICONOGRAPHIE. (From top left) Mandy Ethuin, Carmen Guerrero Nakpil and Chito Madrigal Collantes

CARMEN Arnaiz, Gia Nakpil, Carmen Guerrero Nakpil and Lissa G. Nakpil

New book on Bulacan heritage

A NEW BOOK FEATURING THE contributors of Bulacan in the arts has been recently released. Bulacan has eaten than her share of national heroes, great composers and poets, artists and writers, and cultural, historical and religious landmarks.

In this 416 titles, richly illustrated book, editorial anchor Amado Ma. Guerrero takes the reader on an armchair tour of the province and reviews Bulacan's prominent personalities in the arts. It focuses on the achievements, past and present, in architecture, visual arts, literature, music, dance, theater, and crafts.

Produced by the Provincial Youth, Sports, Employment, Arts & Culture Office (PYSEACO) of Bulacan and solicited supervision, design and print production by Textual 906, "Bulacaneses" is the next best thing to an actual educational tour of the province.

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A marriage of the airwaves

HOMBRE duo Isidro Ariel Urera, left, and Vitoria Cordero, owner, with ABS-CBN executive Peter Murphy

Welcome to TeleRadyo—radio pretending to be TV, or is it actually the other way around?

By Pocholo Concepcion

TWO RADIO HOSTS OPEN THEIR DOOR with horrified brains: "Sir pe-ang hairstyle-hurong si Ariel Urera ... or its current ang advising adoring si Vitoria Cordero ..."

The humor hits hard because they're also being seen on TV.

Welcome to TeleRadyo, the broadcasting convergence in which ABS-CBN's top-rating radio station, dzMM 630 AM, is also beamed on Sky Cable's TV Channel 46.

TeleRadyo is carried by regional cable operators via satellite nationwide. Soon, it will also be seen overseas, on The Filipino Channel.

Urera, noon' Best Variety Program Host for Radio in the recent KBP Golden Dove Awards, now "Pogiest mamaho-adoring-marikong, mga photographer kasi. Absolutely hetsi, lage-lo-queen pala. Aawat ko kapo ng dyaryo-tinula dotso ..."

Shining moment

The program, "Radio Todo, Walang Preno" (Monday-to-Friday, 10:30 a.m. to 12:30) it a freewheeling variety show that's as entertaining as it's informative. Discussion subjects could be as frivolous as what's good to eat on a rainy day or as serious as the role that blood pressure plays in one's health. It has a daily contest in which a "word for the day" is defined. (Examples: What does "bodaphop" mean?)

It sounds interesting enough on radio, but looks more dynamic on TV as the viewers own how the program is constructed.

TeleRadyo started airing only in April this year, and one of its shining moments occurred just two months ago.

A few minutes after the Glorietta blast on Oct. 19, dzMM Radyo Patrol reporters were scrambling to get to the site but were caught in traffic.

One of them was told to get out of the service vehicle and take the MRT. Another was advised to fly down the first motorcycle-taxi he saw—such offer him P200 for to ride-o Chabeta.

Fundamentals

"In the meantime, imagine that the DWC [cybernetic news gathering] team—of both ABS-CBN and CMA 7 team also stuck in traffic, in many layers," says Peter Murphy, head of the ABS-CBN Radio and Sports division and the guy who put Tele-Radyo together.

"We had been practicing with 20 cell phone video, but it was more of 8MB, mga zilla. For the Glorietta newsbreak, dinukot-dukot ang 5G, 'Get me this' not knowing how long the video image would last at marunong-kung-sinperformers-sa-cell phone-video."

Raw footage of the blast, using a 3G, made it to "TV Patrol" and 24/7, it was shot by Radyo Patrol reporter David Dio, who had gone inside Glorietta with his phone.

Murphy says the basic stumps were forgivable since the situation was chaotic, anyway. Plus, DWC also relies on cell phone videos and phone when correspondents file reports, as in the recent Myanmar crisis.

"It doesn't matter that you're radio preserving to be television. You have to be basic, just enrol to 'hone the fundamentals.' Meaning: reporters. "Pag nitulo nawalang sina na balita, hindi ding radio nga-pwet yun ... It's a marriage of voice-reporting and TV journalism."

Concept refined

Murphy recalls that the idea for TeleRadyo started when ABS-CBN chair/CEO Gabby Lopez asked if it was possible to put 220,000 on cable TV. He [Murphy] said it was. Lopez specified that he wanted something more professional than just using a webcam.

The concept was refined after experiencing difficulty when the 4.6 at dzMM went expert was first simulcast via ABC. Two TV cameras ate up a lot of space in the radio booth. So Murphy thought of setting two special types of cameras that were just lying around the station—the robotic camera, which is operated with a joystick from a remote location and doesn't need a cameraman, and the Ipolux, so called because it looks like a Ipolux and very

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1 MARTIAN CHILD
2 ELIZABETH: GOLDEN AGE
3 GRINDHOUSE: DEATH PROOF
4 BATANES
5 BEOWULF
6 ENCHANTED
7 THE GOLDEN COMPASS
8 CATACOMBS

NOVALICHES

1 PASUKOB
2 BATANES
3 HOOD of HORROR
4 THE GOLDEN COMPASS

PIONEER

1 THE GOLDEN COMPASS
2 ELIZABETH: GOLDEN AGE
3 MARTIAN CHILD
4 ENCHANTED

STA. ROSA

1 THE GOLDEN COMPASS
2 BALLS of FURY
3 BATANES
4 THE KINGDOM

LIPA

1 THE KINGDOM
2 BALLS of FURY
3 THE GOLDEN COMPASS
4 FRED CLAUS
5 THE KINGDOM

DASMARINAS

1 RENDITION
2 GHOST SON
3 BATANES
4 THE GOLDEN COMPASS

IMUS

1 RENDITION
2 THE GOLDEN COMPASS
3 GHOST SON
4 BATANES

ANGELES

1 THE NANNY DIARIES
2 GHOST SON
3 GREE PARADISE
4 THE GOLDEN COMPASS

TARLAC

1 HITMAN / FRED CLAUS
2 THE GOLDEN COMPASS
3 THE KINGDOM

STARMILLS

1 EASTERN PROMISES
2 BATANES
3 THE NANNY DIARIES
4 HOOD of HORROR
5 RENDITION
6 THE GOLDEN COMPASS

BACOLOD

1 Indestine: 3 DAYS of DARKNESS
2 BOOGEYMAN 2
3 GREEN PARADISE
4 FRED CLAUS
5 THE GOLDEN COMPASS
6 EASTERN PROMISES

ILOILO

1 HITMAN
2 THE GOLDEN COMPASS
3 EASTERN PROMISES
4 GAME PLAN
5 GREEN PARADISE
6 BOOGEYMAN 2

3 days of darkness
tatlong araw ng kadiliman
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SM CINEMA
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Your life as a movie

A marriage . . .

From page E1

small but gives a kind's eye view of the hoods.

The robotic one first used in basketball games; the lipstick, to titillate transvestites.

Not exactly new

A dyed-in-the-wool radio man, Mateo says Telebalaya is not exactly a novel idea. He unleashed subjects that dyed, dyed and dyed that had already been airing their personalities on their respective TV channels, but on a limited scope. Human factors deny it's why he has Sunday morning radio program, broadcast on DZRH.

"In our case," Mateo points out, "relaying all the way 24/7. We really planned it for digital TV (accessible through the Set), although we have not launched it. By the moments we put it on cable."

Mateo describes Telebalaya as reality radio. "Sa telago ito, nagkuto at nagsisi nanuto. At saka transporting them to another studio where they can do their radio program on a TV-oriented set," he says. "That's really our dubbed heads, dinagdagan lang namin ng fluorescent lamps para mas luminosidad."

Chez secretary why Sid Dalon looks different on Telebalaya, he has dishevelled and his eyes hidden by sunglasses. Mateo explains: "Sid came up to me and said, 'Sana okay lang ha, kasi gusto akong lagyan ng eyeglasses."

Mateo seconded, with a small reservation: "Sana huwag lang gaya-gayahin ang mga."

Telebalaya is perfect for people who can't sit and wait for TV newscasts. On Telebalaya's roundtable session are the following visual elements: the announcers (plus the day's headlines, sports results, prime-time rate, temperature of key cities nationwide, text messages from listeners, basic food prices and public service—like missing persons and emergency notices).

That's a lot of information at a glance.

The reason that Mateo was very upbeat about transforming AM into Telebalaya was the number of popular newscasters radio MO+CBC has in its ranks. Aside from Ariel and Sid, there's Karen Davila, Bernadette Sembrano, Cory Quirino, among others. "Sanay kasi sa celebrity ito e," Mateo says. "And they're good to watch and look at. Group sa array to sing-sing 'yun, and yet when they're on Telebalaya, makikita mo sinabi'yan sa sila."

"SEXY Wanna," "Heartbid Artist" —a whole new meaning on-com.

My wish list for this show biz world that I grew up in

SHANG CINEPLEX
ENCHANTED
KINGDOM
GOLDEN COMPASS
ENDGAME
PREMIERE THEATRE
ELIZABETH
Catch the Cineplex Special
Avail the Shang Cineplex E-wee Club Giftcards.
The Perfect Giftcard for the Holiday Season!
Its a gift your family and friends will surely appreciate.
Enjoy 10% discount on the E-wee club membership fee.
Limited offer from Nov. 26, 2007 - Jan. 15, 2008 only.
Shangri-la Plaza

JUST WE ALL BEATING AND LIVE LIKE it's Christmas every day, even when things seem bleak. Into every life some rain must fall, so that we may all have roses in December. No matter how chaotic show biz is, I still love being here because this is where my roots are. Here's my Yuletide wish list for the world I grew up in.

Unbelievable

... overexposed TV personalities be given a rest. The public deserves a break from seeing too much of them.

... similar would-be stars on reality work more than the quantity of publicity they get.

... actors would just act and singers would just sing. Why try to be everything, including what you're not?

... the network wars wouldn't go overboard by being too obsessed with ratings.

... producers would stop recycling the mediocrities of yesteryears and come up with worthwhile films.

... there would be just one award-giving body with credibility (like the Oscars).

DOLLY WOOD
Dolly Anne Carvajal

... we could do away with titles (Queen of This, King of That). Everyone is only as good as his/her last performance.

... TV ratings would not be a barometer of Filipino values.

... there would be less "genius" and more "talagas" in the industry.

... there would be fewer attempts in TV shows. The public deserves better than a rehashed version of same US shows.

... there would soon be an end to subtexts, stereotypes and humorless on-prime time TV.

... indie films would proliferate. It gives hope to a stagnating industry and gives work to underemployed people.

... viewers and shakers in the industry would let Hollywood, not out of love but out of respect.

... there were more room left for the truth amid all the masquerade.

Recycled idea

Imus Productions' MMFF entry "Buddy" is sure to amuse the hugots crowd that is hooked on the word "tanod (watch)."

In the movie, villains transform into monster characters clad, not in steel trainmen but in outfits made of old tires, military antiperonins and junked machines. They're recycled with an imaginative good enough for a fashion show.

Aside from that, it features new generation stars like Jennylyn Mercado, Dingdong Dantes, DJ Yoradal, Michelle Madrigal, Paolo Gozo, Mykee Dizon, Sunjit Sison, Empress Schuck, Brian and Julz Revilla, Jairus Aquino, Ella Cruz and Jiannel. "Buddy" is one exciting circle of re-uneless

Guess list

■ Guess who this senior is, who was so sweep-sweep with a government manual, sure businessman is cowed by her. Was it just an innocent illusion or will it turn into a dangerous liaison? Wonder if the senior's paramour has any inkling about it — or has he turned a blind eye to her indiscretions? Guess a blind but how long can it play don't-county-tab?

■ The staff of a show where this one hosts a segment is really pissed at him. "He makes us wait for hours during our taping at his office," one of them laments. "And he doesn't offer us even a glass of water!" The segment host is apparently not grateful.

Drunken housemate

After Raven Golder "intervened" all the girls inside the PBB house when he got drunk, his ex-GF visited a romantic friend. "I'm not surprised that he did that. Now the world knows what he's really like."

In the first place, they shouldn't have let Raven touch alcohol since he has a drinking problem. It's all right to consume alcohol as long as you don't let it consume you.

Davidvs Goliatha

Could it be true that aside from David Beaumont's alleged embezzlement of Jewelry Hills 9501 client's funds, he also got into trouble with some local government units? Since he really got a big cut from the loans he facilitated for the LGUs? Looks like David has a lot of Goliaths to slay when he comes back from the United States.

E-mail: entertainingbulwarge.ibd@yahoo.com

Christmas with Shrek

"SHREK THE HALLS," A HALF-HOUR special that celebrates the joy of the holidays season with Shrek and his family, will be featured on Studio 23 tomorrow at 9 p.m.

It features the voices of Mike Myers (Shrek), Cameron Diaz (Fiona), Eddie Murphy (Donkey) and Antonio Banderas (Puss in Boots).

CLICK!

Also airing on Christmas day are "The Santa Claus Brothers" at 7:30 p.m. and the Christmas episode of "Ugly Betty" at 9:30 p.m.

Animated film

Snow Wilis, Steve Carell and Avril Lavigne lend their voices to adorable woodland creatures in HBO's "Over The Hedge" on Dec. 25 at 1 p.m.

The animated film features forest animals who wake up to find their natural habitat demolished by an RV-ing family.

A raccoon named RJ then hatches a plan to lead the starving animals over the hedge to gather food from their new human neighbors' garbage cans.

Cheers project

"The 700 Club Asia" will air its Christmas special episodes starting tonight until Dec. 28, 11:30 p.m. on Q 11.

The show's hosts Bro Jimmy Tio, Fr. Jojo Fonglemon Bunsoy, Ginny Reyes, Marivel Tayag Pangilinan and Peter Ramos will give gifts to five charitable institutions as beneficiaries of Operation Blessings Holiday of Hope and Cheers Project.

Pinoy quirks

Beauty queen/TV host Miriam Quiambao and commercial model Joaquin Wilder explore the many quirks of being Pinoy in GMA 7's latest show "100% Pinoy" every Thursday after "Sahaz."

ENTERTAINMENT

METRO MANILA FILM FESTIVAL 2007

(Inquirer Entertainment is running this HAPPY guide to help moviegoers plan their holiday cinema fare. The festival runs from tomorrow till Jan. 7, 2008.)

"Barat"

Cinefilipino Films

Stars: Christopher de Leon, Alfred Vargas, Paolo Contis, Cesa Pueblo, Paolo Paraiso, Jeny Gonlib, Evangeline Pascual, Ina Alegre, Leo Martinez, Roy Alvarez

Directed by Cesar Apolinario

Two sons—one idealistic (Contis), the other corrupt (Vargas)—undergo SWAT training with a hopeless but lovable mentor (De Leon). The rookies' battle and values are later tested when they uncover an assassination plot against the visiting Pope. Granted $ by the Cinefilipino Studio, this suspense-drama "carries a marketable Pinoy action film," according to a CMO memo. Jam-related story below). The board also commends debuting director Apolinario, a CMA 7 alma mater. In his "first group of the material. It's well-researched and (co-)with pitch-perfect characters." The board similarly commends the performances of Vargas, Contis, and De Leon.

Color-grading a fest entry

By Bayani San Diego Jr.

DIRECTOR CESAR APOLINARIO AND cinematographer Ian Morgan of CinemaWorld worked closely with post-production house Optimo and film lab Optiscolors to finish the Metro Manila Film Festival entry "Barat."

"We followed an integrated approach to filmmaking," said Mary Ambet, chief technical officer of Optimo Digital (OD) and general manager of Optiscolors.

This "integrated approach," Ambet reported in January-November last April, allows independent filmmakers to avail of Optimo's post-production and Optiscolors' printing facilities.

Raw state

"Barat" was originally shot with a Panasonic P2 digital camera," Ambet related. "Although it's considered HDV (high-definition video), it's not a high-end digital camera."

Since it wasn't shot with a pricier camera, OD "took every core of the images," Ambet said.

"What we did was convert the images to RT Format," said Vito Amoroso, OD general manager and chief operating officer.

"We also endeavored to keep the material in its raw state," Ambet added.

Film-like

The movie's film-like quality was achieved largely because the Optimo team had worked closely with the film's director of photography Jay Linao.

"We had several meetings. We conducted tests to determine the parameters in lighting scenes: key scenes—whether interior low-light or exterior daylight."

The action movie, directed by first-time filmmaker Cesar Apolinario, also underwent "extensive color grading."

"The day that the shots needing extensive shot, it was chaotic," recalled Ambet. "The shoot began at 5:30 p.m. But in color-grading, the actual's setting was changed from dusk to early afternoon."

Ambet was present on the set, leading his color-grading supervisor to the "Barat" team. "I advised them on what can or cannot be done in the post-prod stage."

Computer-generated

A few computer-generated images were thrown in for good measure.

The Optiscolors team added a 3-D CG helicopter in the some climactic scene.

"It was a computer-generated chopper," Amoroso related. "Our Sebastian, the head of our 3-D team, sent it to Filmcore for them to study the look of a PNP (Philippine National Police) chopper."

Since the filmmakers were working on a

COLOR GRADING 31

Film academy proclaims awardees

By Marinel R. Cruz

JOSE JAVIER REYES' "KASAL, KASAL, KASAL, Kasali" is romantic comedy on the highs and lows of being newly-weds, has bagged the biggest number of Luna Awards from the Film Academy of the Philippines (FAP) this year.

"Kasal, Kasali, Kasali" or KKK, produced by Star Cinema, snagged the Best Picture citation from four other nominees—"Inang Yaya" (Unitel Productions), "Kubrador" (GreenHope Productions), "Rekwador" (MLR Films) and "Sukob" (Star Cinema).

KKK lead actress Judy Ann Santos beat veterans Gina Pareño ("Kubrador") and Shaina Sotimo ("Inang Yaya") to the Best Actress Award for her performance in Angie, Jodi's (Kaya Specialist) headstrong wife. Santos was also nominated for her role in the heartrending and multifaceted Abby in "Don't Give Up On Us."

Shared trophy

Reyes is this year's Best Director awardee, and shared the Best Screenplay trophy with Mary Jane Ramirez, also for KKK.

Pareño, who plays Angie's mother Doris, was also honored Best Supporting Actress.

Vito Cajili was all ready the Best Editing award for KKK.

John Lloyd Cruz topped the Best Actor

MLR '11

'KASAL, Kasali, Kasali'

A diaria serella by CARLO J. CAPARAS

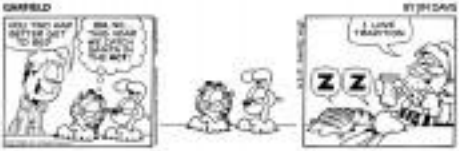
To have to hold

Art: ARNEL A. AVETRIA

A-LIPIN — BY JOSAMEN

PUGAD BABOY — BY TEN JUNIOR

GARFIELD — BY JIM DAVIS



BABY BLUES — BY JERRY SCOTT

ATOMO AND WEEGY — BY LYRA GARCIA-LANO

GOVERNOTS — BY ELIZABETH CHIONGLO

EKID MACHINE — BY FRANCK ABRERA

BEN — BY DANIEL SHELTON

DAILY CROSSWORD

HOROSCOPE

CONCEPTIS SUDOKU

Concepts SudoKu

By Dave Green

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			6	7	4			
3			2	9	8			7
	6	5				9	8	
	4	3		1		7	5	
	9	8				2	3	
8			3	2	1			5
			9	4	5			
		1				4		

Difficulty Level ★ 1334

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HOW TO PLAY SU DOKU

Fill the grid so that every column, every row and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9.

Tips and program at www.sudoku.com

Answer to previous puzzle

6	7	4	5	3	8	2	1	9
8	2	3	1	7	9	6	5	4
9	1	5	4	6	2	8	7	3
7	3	9	2	8	6	5	4	1
5	8	6	9	4	1	7	3	2
2	4	1	3	5	7	9	6	8
1	5	7	8	2	3	4	9	6
4	9	8	6	1	5	3	2	7
3	6	2	7	9	4	1	8	5

Young stars rule

THEY MAY BE ONLY 10 their tweens or teens, but young stars rule the roost in Hollywood this season.

Among the most popular and/or top-grossing young luminaries are Dakota Fanning, Zach Efron, Vanessa Hudgens, Miley Cyrus, Nikki Blonsky and Daniel Radcliffe.

Also clearly on her way as big-time starlets is youngster newcomer Dakota Blue Richards, who debuted the plum role of Lyra Belacqua in the spectacular enough controversial fantasy film, "The Golden Compass."

Not only did Richards' character provide the movie with its central point of view, but she also figured in many of its key sequences, acting with Nicole Kidman, among other big stars. How did she learn to be so lucky?

Firm charge from the get-named Dakota (Blue because her mother wanted a mix of a plum name and a color. So, "Dakota Blue Richards" didn't quite cut it. So, Dakota Blue it was—with no intended incursion into Dakota Fanning's territory.

In any case, Richards won an audition with acting chat she studied in a theater school. Still, no major break came but way until "The Golden Compass" auditioned over 10,000 girls for the role of Lyra—and Richards won.

She attributes her success at the audition to her mother, who told her not to brush her hair before her audition as she would look appropriately "wild" for the ingenue lead character.

For his part, director Chris Weitz says she chose Richards simply because "she lit up the screen more than any of the other girls." Reviewers generally agree, typifying her performance in the movie as "exuberant."

Similarly impressed, producers have already cast her in a follow-up film, "The Secret of Moonacre," which will be shown next year.

Petite charmer

Also flying high this year is Ellen Page, a petite charmer who's just been nominated as best actress by the Golden Globes for her edgy portrayal of the title character in the "Juno."

Unlike Richards, Page may be young, but she's been around for quite a while. She started to star acting at an early

TURN TO E4

VIEWFINDER

Nestor U. Torre

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ELIZABETH: GOLDEN AGE PG13 | MARTIAN CHILD G | THE GOLDEN COMPASS PG13

THE KINGDOM R15 | DEATH PROOF R15 | ELIZABETH: GOLDEN AGE PG13

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Bahay Kubo A Pinoy Mano Po!

Direction Joel C. Lamangan, mpc

Isabella Sam Rita

An OFFICIAL ENTRY to the 2007 METRO MANILA FILM FESTIVAL-PHILIPPINES

Text BAHAY to 239

OPENS TOMORROW

GP

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OPENS TOMORROW

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OPENS JANUARY 1

COMGUILD Production Co.

OFFICIAL ENTRY TO THE 2007 METRO MANILA FILM FESTIVAL

THOU SHALT NOT KILL

BANAL

CHRISTOPHER DE LEON PABLO CURTIS ALFRED VARGAS

Film academy proclaims . . .

From page F1

award for the Anne Bernal and Don Cuaresma romantic film "All About Love." Cirse composed with Nicholl Arevalo ("Barcelona"), Edsle Garcia ("I Wanna Be Happy"), Mel Llorico ("Crossed") and Jocson Padilla (Dan Xia Zaturalmat") for the award award.

This year's winner of the first Supporting Actor award is Johnny Delgado, for his role as the serial killer in Cesar Montano's psychological thriller, "Liquilip."

Jay Linao and Chris Ramos were awarded Best Cinematographer and Best Production Designer, respectively, for their work on the Mark Reyes romantic film, "Kwentong."

The Best Music Score award went to Vincent de Jesus for the Joel Lamangan comedy flick "Lastemak," while the Best Sound award was given to Ingo Reyes for Mark Reyes' "Till I Met You."

Breaking tradition, the FAP decided to announce the winners before holding its awards ceremony on Thursday, Dec. 27, at the Club Filipino in San Juan City.

Lack of funds

In a phone interview on Saturday, FAP director general Leo Martinez said Inquirer Entertainment that lack of funds had resulted in the cancellation of the annual Luna Awards show. Instead of a lavish ceremony, Martinez said, the FAP decided to host a simple dinner for the awardees.

Special awards will be given to Rudy Fernandez and Celso Ad. Castillo (The Fernando Poe Jr. Lifetime Achievement Award), Chanu Santos-Concio and Wilson Tieng (Manuel de Leon Award).

Recipients of the Lamberto Avellana Memorial (Pandecmon) awards are Manuel Conde and Vic Silayan.

ACTRESS Dru Morales poses in Los Angeles with PEW's new holiday ad campaign material titled "Fur: I'd Rather Go Naked" in which she is featured.

Young stars . . .

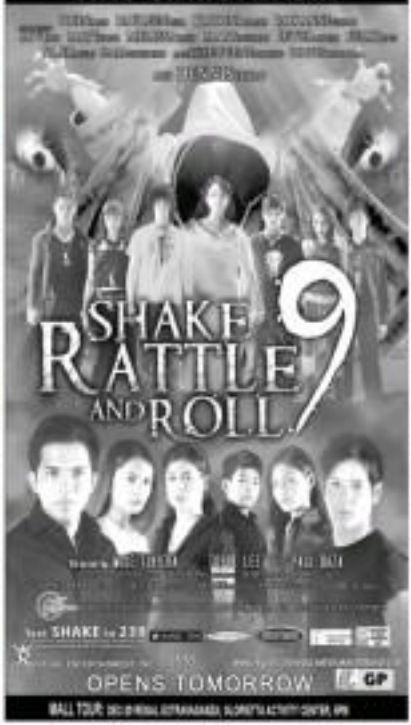
From page F1

age, as she enrolled in the Stephanie Theatre School. Her first appearance was in the TV show "Oh Penny," where she did so well that she received a Young Artist Award nomination for best performance.

Other TV shows followed—"Trailer Park Boys," "Going for Broke," "Reclaiming"—but things really started heating up for the young comer when she did the film "Final Combo" in 2005, followed by "I, Shiva: The Last Stand" in 2006 (she played Kitty Fryde).

The 2007 film season saw Page come into her own as a young star with "An American Crime," "The Tracey Fragments," "The Scene Stealer" and "Juno." Four movies in one year? That impressive.

2008 should turn out to be a banner year for Ellen Page. She has two new movies in production with 2008 release dates: "Lightspeed" and "Jack and Diane." Clearly her stellar career arc is stratosphere bound.



Color-grading . . .

From page F1

limited budget, they couldn't blow up a real Honda CRV 1996, as required by the script.

"The production design department was very accommodative in looking for a car model that's also available in the midrown of computer generated images," Ambat noted. "Actually we had to buy that image from the United States," Jimenez recalled.

"It took us a week to accomplish said effect," Ambat said.

"But if we had to start from scratch, it would've been hard, as creating every detail," Jimenez said.

Ultimate system

For next year's festival, Quinta anticipated besides their the I.E.Sam Cut Hard.

"Besides, it dubbed the ultimate color grading system," said Ambat. "It's non-linear, and allows a specialist to work on high-resolution film with the efficiency and tools of digital."

In Southeast Asia, Resolve can only be found in Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines.

Asked if Jimenez "This strengthens our position as a post-production house. We can work on two to three movies, plus our advertising load, at the same time."